This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

2418.13

Gratis.

28 Feb., 1883.

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

ΠΤΟ

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

BY

MARY A. LEWIS,

AUTHOR OF "A RAT, WITH THREE TALES."

"All the endless occupation without purpose, and idleness without rest, of our vulgar world, are not, it seems to me, enjoyments we need be anxious to communicate. . . . To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over plough-share or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray,—these are the things that make men happy."—JOHN RUSKIN.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1881.

(*All rights reserved.*)

22 c No. 13
1883. Feb. 28,
Grates.
3 vol.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

## CHAPTER I.

". . . Whoever says
To a loyal woman, love and work with me,
Will get fair answers, if the work and love,
Being good themselves, are good for her—the best
She was born for. Women of a softer mood,
Surprised by men, when scarcely awake to life,
Will sometimes only hear the first word 'love,'
And catch it up with any kind of work,
Indifferent, so that dear love go with it:
I do not blame such women. . . ."

E. B. BROWNING.

A SHOWER of rice, a volley of satin shoes, a sound of murmured farewells; and Effie Carew was whirled away from the home in which she had spent the last eight years

of her life. The group of friends who had been watching her departure from the front hall, and from the balcony, re-entered the drawing-room; there was a little more talk about the fortunate brightness of the day, the charming appearance of the bride, and the number of the presents; and then, one by one, the guests melted away, and Lady Loder was left alone in her pretty house in Mayfair.

Not that it looked particularly pretty at that moment. The furniture had mostly been removed to make more space, the walls were surrounded by tables laden with clocks, china, and miscellaneous goods enough to suggest that financial ruin had overtaken the proprietor, and that all his possessions were being inventoried for sale. Lady Loder glanced around; the place seemed empty and desolate; a light-grey glove lay on the carpet in one place, a

shoe-buckle in another; here was a pink bow, there was a fan; all the multifarious relics which a crowded London party leaves behind it, combined to make the room additionally untidy and unattractive; and it was with a sigh of weariness that Lady Loder, having rung the bell, and desired Macay to see to the putting away of the presents and the re-establishment of order, passed into the little boudoir which alone had escaped the disturbance in the rest of the house.

Here she sat herself down at the writing-table and took a pen in her hand, but the words did not seem to flow easily. Lady Loder was a well-looking woman of about sixty-five, the widow of Viscount Loder, of Framley Hall, Sussex, who had died of Roman fever ten years before, leaving her with a comfortable income and the house in Hertford Street, which she had inhabited

ever since. After two years of widowhood she had reappeared in the world, and thinking that society would be more pleasant if she had somebody to take out with her, she invited two young nieces of her husband's, Effie and Alice Chorley, to come and share her home. With them she was asked to nearly every ball and party in London, and though the girls never grew very fond of her, she was much the happier for having them: it gave her an excuse for constantly meeting with her acquaintances, and as she was an easy-going person, who took life as she found it, she never asked for or expected more affection than they were able to give.

At the end of three years Alice married a Mr. Erskine, of Penterwood, in Essex, and died in less than a twelvemonth; Effie continued to live with her aunt, though after Alice's departure they gradually

became less and less friendly, till latterly they had been on terms of armed neutrality and little more. The fact was, Lady Loder was disappointed at Effie's not marrying. Up to twenty-two, or even twenty-three, it was all very well, but when twenty-four and twenty-five came, and Effie was still Miss Chorley, Lady Loder began to speak frequently and strongly on the subject. But all her representations served but to increase the coldness between them.

To begin, Effie was not one of those gentle, yielding, dependent girls who are popular with men, and proposals did not, therefore, come pouring in as they might otherwise have done; and besides, matrimony was a subject on which the young lady had strong ideas of her own: none of the three or four men whom she might have married suited her fancy, nor could her

aunt's remonstrances induce her to do otherwise than refuse each in turn.

When Mr. Talbot asked her to marry him, Lady Loder had been thankful for her want of appreciation, for he was a younger son with four hundred a year and no profession; when Colonel Farringdon paid her attention throughout a whole season, and she repressed him so unmistakably that he never came to the point, Lady Loder looked grave; when Mr. Denham, with a good property in Yorkshire, proposed to her and was "declined, with thanks," she did not disguise her displeasure; but when, last year, Lord Garnier, Lord Arenby's eldest son, wrote from Madrid, where he was in the diplomatic service, asking her to be his wife, and she again turned a deaf ear, Lady Loder's anger knew no bounds.

"What can you possibly have to say against him?" she inquired.

"Nothing," replied Miss Chorley.

"Then why should you refuse him?" she asked, with growing irritation.

"Because I don't care for him, Aunt Mary."

"You told me last week you liked him very much."

"So I do."

"Then why won't you accept him?"

"Because, if I don't get beyond liking him now, I should dislike him most heartily before I had been married to him six months."

"Well, all I can say is, I hope you mayn't live to regret what you are doing. Remember you are twenty-six, and that your fortune is only four thousand pounds." Lady Loder had a way of enunciating crude truths at times.

The girl's face had grown stern and hard. "Suppose we end this discussion, Aunt Mary."

Her aunt paused; she dimly perceived that she could not have made a remark less likely to promote her object. "Will you not write another answer," she said more gently; "or, at least, take time to think the matter over?"

"I have had quite time enough to think it over. The note is gone; I sent it to post as soon as it was finished."

"Your behaviour is very wrong, and foolish and ungrateful," the aunt had said; and from that day the small amount of cordiality between them had become smaller. At Christmas time, however, Effie had paid a round of visits in Hampshire, had met Mr. Carew, had found in him the qualities in which, rightly or wrongly, she thought Lord Garnier deficient, and, after a month's acquaintance, had written to tell her aunt that she had accepted him.

Lady Loder gave a gloomy assent. She

had come to understand that Effie was not a girl who would ever do her any credit, and she was not sorry to be rid of her. Mr. Carew was a barrister with a sufficient income, and a small house in Lower Belgrave Street; the connection was unobjectionable, though not particularly desirable. Besides, if she remonstrated, her niece would probably pay no heed; and, above all, even if she succeeded in breaking off the engagement, it was very doubtful whether she would make a better match. "She is a wilful, headstrong girl," the aunt said to herself, with a bitter recollection of Lord Garnier, "and she must have her own way." And so she wrote a letter of approval.

The buying of the trousseau, the arrival of the presents, and the receiving and answering of the numerous congratulatory letters, occupied the time of both

ladies. Mr. Carew was attentive and considerate; Effie was determined that the last few weeks of her home life should leave no unpleasant reminiscences behind them; she had striven hard to keep the peace, and had succeeded.

The wedding had gone off well, and no one could have guessed that anything but the most heartfelt affection reigned between aunt and niece.

And now it was over, Lady Loder sat at her writing-table and pondered. Suddenly she looked up at the clock, and saw that the post-time was not far off; she dipped her pen for the fourth or fifth time in the ink, and wrote—

"97, Hertford Street, Mayfair.

"DEAR MR. RANSOME,

"You may have heard that my niece, Effie Chorley, was to be married to-

day, and that I am in consequence left alone. My cousin, Maude Loder, is coming to me; but, as it is dull for a young girl to live alone with an old woman, I am going to ask you if you would like to send your eldest daughter to be with me during the season. I have seen her photograph, and have heard how very good-looking she is; and if you have a mind to take the chance of what a few months of going out in London may do for her, let me have her. I am going to be quite candid with you. If I take her, I do not mean to have all the rest of her family about the house, and I do not promise to keep her beyond the end of July.

"While she is with me I will provide her with the necessary clothes, so that she will be no extra expense to you in that respect. I have heard that you have a large family and limited means, so my belief

is that you will find my offer sufficiently advantageous to be accepted.

"Believe me

"Yours very truly,

"MARY P. LODER."

"I do trust she won't be outrageously vulgar; it is rather a risk," murmured Lady Loder, as she leant back in her chair and re-read her letter. She folded it, stuck it, addressed it to

*Philip Ransome, Esq.,*
*Alexandra Villa,*
*Falconbridge.*

and desired Macay to post it. But when the deed was done she again hesitated, and nearly rang to counter-order the sending of her missive. Instead of this, however, she took up a photograph which was lying on the table, and examined it attentively. "No," she said, "she cannot be

very bad with such a face. Where can she have got it from! Philip Ransome was plain enough when I knew him, thirty years ago, and I don't think that Arabella Kitts, the much-coveted partner at the Plymouth Militia balls, can have brought those refined looks into the family. Anyhow, I'll chance it."

## CHAPTER II.

"How charming to be with her! yet, indeed,
After a while I feel a blank succeed;
After a while she little hath to say:
I'm silent too, although I wish to stay.
What would it be all day, day after day?"

CLOUGH.

THE post came in late at Falconbridge, and at nine o'clock no letters had yet arrived; nevertheless, among the ladies of the family there was considerable excitement at this calm morning hour. The noise they had been making had driven Mr. Ransome out of the room; but even he seemed perturbed in spirit as he sat in front of the parlour table, with a book in his hand and an absent look in his eyes,

as if he were perfectly unconscious of the contents of the page before him.

The party grouped round the dining-room table was large, and strong-lunged. There was Mrs. Ransome, a tall, big woman, in black that had seen better days; there were Christine and Beatrix, the two eldest daughters; Lottie and Florence, the twins; Sophy, who was still in short frocks; and Hester, a fat, common-looking child of seven.

Of the four younger girls nothing need be said but that they were sturdy young people with thick waists, prominent red ears, and a decided love of cheap jewellery.

Beatrix was quite different. She was tall and graceful, with a well-shaped head, a brilliant complexion, and soft grey eyes, fringed with long lashes. In the distance she was very like her eldest sister, but closer at hand the resemblance vanished.

For Christine was unquestionably a beauty, as every one owned; from the butcher's boy who had been entranced by the sight of her in the street, and had stood open-mouthed to watch her, oblivious of chops and steaks; to the tourists and travellers who came to visit the old Norman church at Falconbridge, and who would turn and stare at her, eye-glass in eye, if they chanced to meet her, saying, "By Jove! what a pretty girl!" Her mother looked upon her with honest pride, and tried to think that she herself had been "the image of Christine in days gone by."

Her glossy fair hair rose in broad waves from her forehead, her eyebrows were pencilled in in a darker shade above her deep-blue eyes. Her nose was straight, her mouth curved like a bow, and full of small regular teeth; she had more chin than most Englishwomen possess, but her deli-

cate pink and white skin was thoroughly English; and when she laughed, in the middle of the transparent rose-colour on each cheek appeared a dimple, which made the beholder long she should laugh again. She was tall and slight, and had the good taste to eschew the tawdry earrings and gigantic cameo brooches of the rest of the family. She, like her sisters, wore the navy serge which is the harbour and refuge of economical dressers; but instead of the crimson or sky-blue bows with which they had decorated their necks, she had on a small gold stud that fastened her linen collar.

Very beautiful she looked as she stood near the window, with an excited flush on her face, listening to Mrs. Ransome's unceasing flow of words, which were being poured forth in the high loud voice which was common to the female members of the

house of Ransome, and with a sound of almost tearful eagerness in her tones.

"I'm sure, dear, that Mr. Palmer's as gentlemanly a young man as you'd see anywhere, and he's nothing to do with the shop beyond calling in once a week, to see if it's all right. He's got his vineries and his peach-houses, and his brougham and his barouche; and if you won't have him, and lose such a chance, I say it's downright flying in the face of Providence—I do. With father growing old, and the five other girls all at home, and nothing to look to among you——"

This had been going on ever since the previous afternoon; when, at the Falconbridge dog-show, Mr. Albert Palmer, who had the year before succeeded his father in Palmer and Gowran's large drapery business in the High Street, and the very pretty villa and grounds three miles out

of the town, had rather unexpectedly proposed to Christine Ransome. Now, this young lady, who never forgot that she was related to the Loders of Sussex, thought an alliance with a "shopkeeper" greatly beneath her. Besides, Mr. Albert Palmer was not sure of his "*h*'s," and he had an odious way of parting his hair down the middle and brushing down the ends flat upon his forehead, where they had every appearance of being stuck with bandoline. But, worse than all this, when last winter there was a report of an engagement between him and Miss Helen Tresham, the banker's daughter, Christine had told all her intimate friends that she "didn't understand how Helen could thus demean herself;" a speech which had greatly raised her in the eyes of one or two very young ladies of sixteen or thereabouts, who were struck by so

noble a contempt for three thousand a year and a country place.

These ideas had been uppermost yesterday afternoon, and she had asked for a few hours' for consideration, promising to send an answer by the ten o'clock post; but, ever since, the charms of three thousand a year had been creeping round her heart. Christine had not been brought up by a mother into whose composition sentiment entered largely, neither had she cultivated her imagination by much novel-reading; she had stitched and hemmed and been generally useful in the household, and had been taught to look to making a good marriage for the sake of the family; and this education had had its effects on her.

She heard as in a daze Mrs. Ransome's torrent of words; she surveyed the room, noted the treacle-stained table-cloth, the glass-shaded wax flowers which her mother

had made at school; the dingy old picture of a ship on fire, which, with its scarlet and yellow streaks on an almost undistinguishable sea, was the only artistic ornament on the finger-smudged walls; and she thought of the cleanliness, the comforts, the luxuries of Keston Court (the refinements she herself could add, for this young lady looked upon herself as perfectly distinct from the middle-class sphere she had hitherto lived in, and as fitted for a very different future), and she yielded.

"Very well, mamma," she said, breaking in upon a recapitulation of the contents of the coach-house and plate-closet; "I'll do it."

"That's a good girl!" exclaimed her mother, halting in the midst of a sentence, and allowing her voice to drop to its natural pitch. "I'll fetch you the ink. Now, what will you say?"

"Oh, do leave me alone," responded Christine, crossly; "I surely can write a letter; and I can tell you it won't be a long one."

"Do be civil to him, child," entreated Mrs. Ransome. But Christine, who sometimes was quicker in temper than those dreamy eyes would have led you to suppose, was not to be coaxed into divulging what she meant to say, and sat down with ruffled brow, to write her note unassisted.

Mrs. Ransome, who was in great doubt as to the forms which ought to be adopted on so important an occasion, could not refrain from taking down the "Polite Letter-writer" and surreptitiously looking to see if there was anything suitable there; but somehow, as she glanced at Christine, she could not feel that such phrases as "My heart, pierced by Cupid's shaft, beats responsive to your own;" or, "I have

consulted my papa and my mamma, and they assure me that, from the high opinion they have formed of your principles and conduct, I shall be safe in placing my happiness in your hands," would be quite what was wanted.

At the end of two minutes Christine jumped up, saying, "There! that will do," And Mrs. Ransome, hastily concealing the volume she had been studying in her ample pocket, read as follows :—

"DEAR MR. PALMER,

"I have thought over your proposal, and have decided to accept it. Our acquaintance has been so short that I hardly know if I am acting wisely, but I dare say we shall get on very well together.

"Yours very truly,

"CHRISTINE RANSOME."

Mrs. Ransome looked aghast. "My dear! do you think any man would take a girl who wrote him such an answer as that?"

"I don't want him to take me if he doesn't like it. If I mayn't send that I shall just write and say No," cried Christine, whose patience was fast giving way.

Mrs. Ransome retracted instantly. "Well, well! I dare say it is all right," she said. It would never do for Christine to change her mind, and after all Mr. Palmer couldn't really throw her over because she wrote shortly, and signed, "Yours truly," instead of—— What ought she to have signed? Mrs. Ransome took a peep at her book in the passage on the way to the kitchen where Charlotte was at work, but unfortunately all the letters ended "Yours, etc.," which did not help her much.

She desired Charlotte to run at once to

the post-office, and then returned with a lighter heart to the dining-room. Just outside the door she met her husband, who, with an open letter in his hand, was hurrying out of the parlour.

"Here's an offer for Christine," he said.

"What! Another! Who from?" cried his wife.

"No, no, not that sort," he replied; "it is a letter from Lady Loder inviting her to spend the season in London."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Ransome; "and now she's gone and accepted young Palmer!"

"What's the matter, mamma?" asked Christine, from within; and joining the excited conclave in the passage, she took the letter from her father's hand, and read it, whilst Beatrix followed it over her shoulder. "You haven't sent my letter, mamma?"

"Charlotte took it not three minutes ago."

Without a word Christine popped on an old garden hat that was hanging on a peg in the hall, and in a second she was flying down the street.

"Oh, I hope she won't catch Charlotte, and then you will send me, mamma?" said Beatrix, who saw in the distance a most enticing panorama of London life.

"Don't be so tiresome, child," responded her mother, tartly.

The whole family stood at the door, watching Christine's rapidly diminishing figure. "The townsfolk will think her mad," querulously remarked Mrs. Ransome. By way of solace to her over-strung feelings she took another survey of Lady Loder's epistle. "She doesn't mean to have all the rest of her family about the house. A nice thing indeed! I wonder

why we shouldn't be good enough company for her! I've half a mind not to let the girl go!" she said with dignity.

Mr. Ransome looked into the dining-room and saw the untidy breakfast table; then his eye fell on Sophy's dumpy figure and ordinary features, and he thought he could enter into his cousin's not very flattering stipulation. He noticed his wife's greasy black cap and shiny garb, and recognized that she was not exactly the sort of person who would be in place among Lady Loder's surroundings. "No, no," he said; "the offer is kind, on the whole; don't be offended. Let the young ones have their turn: you and I had ours long ago, Bella; and a very good time we had of it, if I remember right, years past at Plymouth."

Mrs. Ransome was somewhat appeased by this allusion to her quondam successes,

and went back into the parlour to watch for her girl's return.

In ten minutes or so she reappeared; and, to the joy of all except Beatrix, whose budding hopes were thereby blighted, the letter was in her hand.

"I took the short cut through the shambles," she explained.

"Oh, Christine!"

It was not absolutely the first time that one or other had made use of this by-way, but now the very word seemed incongruous in the mouth of this fair young creature, the rising beauty of the London season.

"Never mind," said the girl, decidedly; "if I'm to write to Mr. Palmer by this post, there isn't a minute to lose. I shan't have time to be very particular in what I say, mother."

"Oh, that doesn't matter now," returned

Mrs. Ransome. "Why, you'll be marrying a duke or an earl in London! What a mercy it was the letter wasn't gone!"

Meanwhile Christine scribbled—

"DEAR MR. PALMER,

"I have been thinking over what you said to me yesterday, but it cannot be. I am sorry you thought of it, and I am sorry that I did not give you a decided answer at the time. In great haste,

"Yours very truly,

"CHRISTINE RANSOME."

"There!"

Mrs. Ransome snatched it out of her hand. Poor Albert! there are no longer any secret references to the "Polite Letter-writer;" no longer does any one care that you should receive your due meed of consideration; never was young man more ruthlessly betrayed than you; never was

there so cruel a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!

When Charlotte was despatched a second time to the post-office, the family, or at least the ladies of the family (for Mr. Ransome had gone to his office, promising to write from thence and accept Lady Loder's proposal), sat down to discuss the happy lot which had befallen one of its members.

"What a quantity of sights you'll see!" sighed Beatrix, enviously. "There's the Tower, and the Mint, and the Thames Tunnel——"

"The Thames Tunnel is done away with, or anyhow it is made into part of the underground railway," corrected Florence, sententiously: "I saw it in the almanack."

"And there's the Queen, and the Princess of Wales, and the Albert Hall, and

the Zoological Gardens. My! Christine; I wish I was you," put in Lotty.

"Don't say 'My!' it's very vulgar," said Mrs. Ransome, feeling that it behoved them now to be on their best manners.

"Why, ma! you say it yourself twenty times a day."

Clearly a general squabble was beginning: they were by no means infrequent in the Ransome establishment, as indeed could hardly be among seven women with loud voices and a love of the last word. Nobody minded them; they hardly disturbed the friendliness of domestic intercourse. But they were very tiresome to lookers-on; and it was as a looker-on, quite outside the pale of the sisterhood, that Christine felt them to-day. Again her brows contracted with a frown, as she tried to abstract her thoughts from the surrounding turmoil, and place them—need

the reader be informed where?—among the contents of her chest of drawers. True, Lady Loder had offered to provide for her needs in respect of her dress; but the girl was anxious to make a creditable appearance on her arrival, and to avoid asking immediately for the fulfilment of her hostess's promise.

All at once the tumult of sound ceased, and Mrs. Ransome exclaimed, "My dear child! here we are wasting our breath over trifles, and forgetting about your clothes," which remark was followed by a slap to Sophy for not having got out her spelling-book, and a scolding to Lotty for not having set her to her lessons; after which the mother and her two eldest daughters disappeared, and spent a perfectly happy morning amid plans for renewing tumbled skirts, and retrimming faded hats—plans which were interrupted

only by occasional disputes between the girls as to whether Beatrix's stores should be laid under contribution to enable Christine to furbish up her wardrobe, or whether Christine's property should be annexed by Beatrix, on the ground that it could easily be replaced in her new home.

The next few days were days of bustle and intense happiness. Papa was persuaded to give Christine a five-pound note to spend on odds and ends. Bee, who had at first been half-jealous, recovered, as the idea had struck her that when her elder sister was gone, *she* should be the pretty Miss Ransome; and Mrs. Ransome employed half the time in drawing vivid pictures of London life, which, if they were more graphic than accurate, amused her daughters, in spite of their occasional suspicions of the maternal veracity. They

stitched, they squabbled, they planned, and they chatted, and had hardly a moment in which even to long for the next week, when Christine was to enter upon her new experiences.

## CHAPTER III.

"Yet in herself she dwelleth not,
Although no home were half so fair;
No simplest duty is forgot,
Life hath no dim and lowly spot
That doth not in her sunshine share."

LOWELL.

AT the same time preparations for a journey were being made in a country place far distant from Falconbridge, where the "young cousin" mentioned in Lady Loder's note was getting ready to move from her old to her new quarters.

Nothing could form a greater contrast to the bustle of Alexandra Villa than the repose of Selby Court; and no one could be more different from the Miss Ransomes, in

manner, appearance, and habits of thought, than Maude Loder. Perhaps the girl was too quiet; but then, her life since her babyhood had tended to make her so. Both her parents died before she was three, and since then she had been in charge of an elderly maiden sister of her father's who had come to live at Selby with her; for she succeeded to the property, and it was thought right that she should be brought up at her own place.

Miss Loder was a grave, conscientious, rather slow-mannered old lady; but she was cultivated and refined, and had a warmth of affection within her that a passing acquaintance would never have suspected beneath that calm exterior. She engaged no governess for her niece, but taught her herself; and as the child's understanding developed, read with her a much wider range of subjects than usually

comes under the notice of young girls. Maude caught her aunt's enthusiasm for poetry, languages, history, and natural science, and the hours spent with her books were quite as happy as those passed in walking about the place or riding on her pony.

Selby was a very retired spot, and the only neighbours within easy distance were Mr. and Mrs. Stainer, at the rectory, and Mrs. Forster, of Broadholt, an invalid lady with three middle-aged daughters. Shustone Priory was not more than five miles off; but it had been uninhabited for years, owing to some lawsuit, which had been only recently settled in favour of a young Sir Walter Grenville, who had just taken possession, and seemed likely to prove rather an acquisition.

Maude Loder's early years were passed in a very even and uneventful manner.

She had reached her nineteenth birthday when at last her aunt awoke to the fact that it was high time her niece should begin to go into society. Miss Loder made an effort, and called on several of the more distant families in the county; she resolved to take Maude to the summer flower-shows and archery meetings, and to the winter balls; and even formed plans for hiring a house in London for the ensuing season, when, in a November fog, she was taken ill with bronchitis and died.

The girl's grief was uncontrollable; for a week she remained crushed and stunned, speaking to no one but her old nurse, Mrs. Robson, and unable to listen to any arrangements for the future. Then came what was meant to be a very kind note from Lady Loder, inviting Maude to make a home with her, saying that the life at

Selby must have been very dull; that in a little while she would be far happier in London; that she would present her as soon as the first of her mourning was over; and that it was a very good thing she should have an opportunity of seeing something of the world.

Maude's grief burst forth afresh; she did not want to leave the place where she had spent the whole of her life; she shrank from contact with strangers; she hated the idea of London society; all her associations were at Selby, and she cried and cried again at the thought of quitting it. But it was clearly impossible she should stay there all alone; so, at the end of a few days, her nurse persuaded her to write to Lady Loder and accept her invitation. A sad interval followed, in which Maude put by or packed up her many small treasures, and then, the very day before

she was to leave, she sickened with scarlet fever.

The trouble she had gone through told upon her now; she was very ill, and for some days her life hung in the balance. But the scale turned in her favour; she gradually mended, and in a few weeks more she was up and about again, looking a mere wreck of her old self: her colour was gone, her hair was cut close to her head, and she was so thin that she appeared half a foot taller than before her illness.

Lady Loder had a perfect dread of infection, and manifold were the instructions which she imparted with regard to washings, fumigatings, and burnings.

At last she announced that at the end of a month at the seaside she should be ready to receive her niece; so Mrs. Robson took her to lodgings at Brighton, and here

her health and looks returned. The air did her so much good that they prolonged their stay to six weeks, and then returned to Selby to do their final packing before leaving the place for an indefinite time.

On the afternoon preceding the day of her departure, Maude was sitting by herself in the dark oak-panelled hall, and was gazing into the wood fire with an absent expression of countenance. She had been the round of the village to take leave of her cottage friends, and had then meant to bid farewell to her favourite haunts in the garden and grounds; but a gale of wind was blowing, and everything out-of-doors was too busy to attend to her.

Never is nature so unsympathetic as in a hurricane. If you are sore at heart, a rainy day weeps with you; a bright day tells of joy after cloud. But in a high wind nothing has neither word nor token for

you: the blast howls and eddies as it wills, the clouds hurry madly along before it, the leaves turn their backs and shiver at its touch; everything is fully occupied with its own concerns, and has no time to grant you a thought. Maude had felt this as she fought her way homewards, and had an unsatisfied sense of having left her good-byes only half-said.

Presently she started at the sound of the door-bell, and in another minute the butler announced "Sir Walter Grenville."

The girl rose; and very beautiful she looked, as she stood with her slim form defined by the glow of the burning logs behind her. The most striking part of her face was her eyes; for they were honest, open brown eyes, set in very blue whites, which looked you straight in the face and made you love them even before you thought of admiring them. Her other

features were good, but perhaps wanted animation, till a smile broke over them and lit them all up. Her head was well put on her shoulders, and was covered with an enchanting crop of tight auburn curls; her manner was shy, but quite devoid of self-consciousness. As her guest entered, she rose and held out her hand.

"I heard you were back, so I thought I would just call and ask after you. I hope I'm not disturbing you. I hadn't meant to come in, but your servant made me."

This speech did not sound particularly civil, but the fact was that Sir Walter felt much embarrassed. He had a young man's horror of being obliged to make condoling speeches, and the sight of Maude's black raiment reminded him that, as he had not seen her since her aunt's death, he was in duty bound to say something by way of

sympathy. He fidgetted his whip from one hand to another, and devoutly wished that he had adhered to his original plan of leaving a card and inquiries, and had not allowed that old bore, Smithson, to let him in for a visit.

"Thank you for coming," said Maude. "I am not in the least busy now; I have quite finished my packing."

"Packing!" repeated the young man. "Then are you going away already?"

"Yes, to-morrow; to my cousin's in Hertford Street." And Maude's eyes filled with tears.

What an out-of-the-way pretty girl she was! Sir Walter wondered that he had not noticed her more when he was last at Selby. And now he had made her cry with his stupid question. He longed to say something comforting; but the sight of her emotion made him shy, and his

attempt at consolation was begun in a loud hilarious voice, quite at variance with his inner sensation of pity.

"You will like London," he said, endeavouring to put the bright side of things before her; "it is an awfully nice place."

And the girl, feeling his kindly intention, smiled as she answered, "Oh yes! I hope so, after a bit; but it will be a great change to me at first. I am quite a country bumpkin, and have never been in London for more than two or three days at a time."

"Have you made all your arrangements here," he asked, "or is there anything in which I could help you?"

"Nothing, thank you," she replied. "Oh yes, by-the-by. Do you know any one who would like to have Smut, my Skye-terrier? Mr. Stainer took him, but he has just been sent back in disgrace,

because he snapped at one of the children, and jumped upon a satin chair."

"Will you give him to me?" said Sir Walter, whose heart warmed towards every dog which crossed his path, and who was delighted to be able to lighten Miss Loder's burdens in a manner so satisfactory to himself. "If you will let me have him, I will take the greatest care of him, and I promise not to turn him adrift even if he snaps at me."

"You won't stuff cayenne pepper lozenges into his mouth, as Johnnie Stainer did. No dog could be expected to bear that."

"No, indeed;" and Sir Walter laughed.

"I will not promise he will keep off the chairs."

"He shall have an armchair all to himself; but I am afraid he must be content with cretonne, as I have no satin covers."

"All the better." She felt very kindly towards her visitor. After several months of solitude it was pleasant to have some one to speak to besides Mrs. Robson, and it was still more pleasant to find that her new friend was ready to extend his benevolence not only to herself but to her dog.

"I will send for him to-morrow, shall I?" he asked. "What o'clock do you go? You will like to keep him to see you off."

But at this allusion to her departure, Maude's tears once more began to gain the upper hand.

"Now I have vexed her again," he thought, looking at her compassionately and with great admiration.

"It's awfully sad leaving a place you're fond of," he said, with real feeling in his voice. "I know it myself, for I had lived twenty-four years—all my life, that is—in Kent, and I was horribly cut up at having

to come here. One gets used to the change in time, though."

"But it is much worse for me than for you," she replied. "You see, I have lost the person I loved best in the world, as well as my home. There," she went on with a sudden burst of confidence, opening a book and pointing to a marked verse; "that is what I have felt ever since my aunt died—

> 'One goeth forth alone
> An unknown fate to face,
> And one, his friend and treasure lost,
> Goeth back to his desolate place.'"

"No!" exclaimed Sir Walter, with unfeigned pity. "Poetry is poor stuff, always gloomy and sad; but still there are verses I like much better than that about the loss of friends. I know lots. Let's see;" and he racked his brains for a consolatory quotation. "Ah, yes.

'She is not dead, but gone before;
She treads on high the golden floor.
We'll go through life and do our duty,
And follow her to heavenly beauty.'

There, now, that's a much more comforting verse," he said.

Maude smiled. "What is it? Who wrote it?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered naïvely; "it's on a tombstone in our old churchyard."

The girl was touched by his simplicity. "Yes, you are quite right," she said softly; "it is a much nicer verse than mine; I'll try to remember it instead." And Sir Walter thought he had made a hit; and so he had, though not exactly in the way he intended.

They talked on for a long time, till the wind went down for its sunset lull, and the light grew dim in the old hall. The young man's kindly, simple way made

Maude feel as if they had been friends for a long time, and her quiet gentle manner, and sad pathetic beauty, and winning expression, were rousing a warmer feeling in her companion's heart, little as she suspected it. At last the dressing-bell rang, and he started up in surprise.

"I have been here more than two hours!" he exclaimed; "I never thought of paying you such a visitation;" and in spite of her assurances that he had not kept her from doing anything she wanted to do, he continued to shower apologies upon her till his horse was brought round.

When the moment came for taking leave, a question hovered on his tongue which he hardly ventured to put into words. "May I come and call upon you in London?" he longed to say; but he was not acquainted with Lady Loder, and hesitated to make the request. Under the influence of these

reflections, he felt that he was saying good-bye coldly and absently. At length a sudden impulse settled the point. "I shall be in London before long, and shall come and try to find you in Hertford Street; may I?" But a flood of misery had overwhelmed Maude, as the break-up of her home rushed upon her memory, after a couple of hours' oblivion; all her self-command forsook her, and she ran away without answering, and sobbed till her head ached, with her face in the sofa-cushions.

Meanwhile her visitor rode homeward, and as he rode he thought. What his meditations were we know not, but they must have been pleasing, for in spite of the gale which was again rising, after its temporary lull, he did not hurry his horse, but allowed it to go at so deliberate a pace, that more than an hour had elapsed before the five miles were traversed that separated Selby from Shustone Priory.

Like Maude Loder, Sir Walter had been left an orphan at an early age. He had been only five when he was disposed of by a bachelor guardian at a preparatory school, and since then, through the successive stages of Eton and Christ Church, he had never known the influences of a home. Perhaps the want of a centralizing spot for his affections had had the effect of making him diffuse them more widely among his casual acquaintance than he would otherwise have done, but certain it was that there was nowhere a young man with more friends who loved him, and whom he loved. His open, smiling countenance was greatly in his favour, his laughing blue eyes, fair hair, and sunburnt, well-formed face, made an attractive *ensemble*, in spite of rather too large a mouth and rather too short a nose. He was decidedly of the optimist school; liking everybody, happy every-

where, and not looking to passing evils, but to the good beyond; too easy-going to have learnt all the lessons which a more reflective lad might have gathered from his life, and therefore young of his age; but with good judgment and a warm heart; and if devoid of any brilliancy of intellect, and not of a brain-power that would ever have "invented gunpowder," or was likely to "set the Thames on fire," he was one of the people for whom the world luckily has still room, although they may never reward it by bestowing any such inestimable benefits on humanity.

His recent succession to the Shustone estate, near Selby Court, and to the Kirkmannon property in Ireland, was the best thing that could have happened to him; it gave him fresh interests and a sense of responsibility. Both places had been the subject of much litigation, and had for

many years been greatly neglected, and Sir Walter found that there would be no lack of occupation for him in either country. A year before he had come across Kingsley's novels, and fired by them with the enthusiasm with which they generally inspire the young and the ardent, he had resolved that, if he won his suit, his two villages should become such as his hero would have approved, and at the present moment he was engaged with all the impetuosity of his twenty-four years in draining, roofing, and otherwise improving his dilapidated tenements at Shustone.

"A very nice young man, my dear," the surrounding mammas would say, after meeting him at dinner; "A real good fellow that," the papas would echo; and if Arabella and Mathilda made no reply, it was not because they disagreed with their parents on the point.

## CHAPTER IV.

"I see some sparkle of a better hope,
Which elder days may happily bring forth."
*Richard II.*

At last the eventful day had come, on which Miss Christine Ransome was to burst on an admiring world. The past week had been one of unmixed enjoyment, and had brought small social triumphs which were augurs of greater ones to follow. No sooner had the news of her good fortune been circulated through the town, which was about three hours from the time at which the letter of invitation had been received, than friends flocked from all sides to ask questions and to wish her joy; she had seven notes asking her to tea, and one

from Lady Esther Hanway (an old lady of exalted rank and limited means, who generally thought herself quite above mixing at all with the Falconbridge people) bidding her to dinner. She had also met Mr. Albert Palmer in the street, and had passed him by with an icy bow, and a sort of "How could you venture, young man?" expression. She had bought a new bonnet and sundry other interesting articles of apparel, and she was treated with unusual deference by mother, sister, and acquaintance. Her father was the only one whom her prospects did not seem to dazzle.

"She'll come back in July with stuck-up ideas, and feel herself out of place among us."

"Nonsense," replied his better half; "she won't come back at all—leastways, without a husband."

"And if she does take some one's fancy

with her pretty face and get married, it will be to some one who will part her from us, and teach her to despise her own flesh and blood."

At first Lady Loder's plan had gratified Mr. Ransome, but now, as will be gathered from the above remarks, the darker view of the subject was uppermost.

"Not a bit of it," responded Mrs. Ransome. "As for you, no elderly man could look more gentlemanly; and I rather think that I am good company enough for any son-in-law, be he whom he may!" and so saying she shook out her papery silk skirts, which were now donned every afternoon (instead of on Sundays and market-days only), partly in expectation of visitors, but still more because they seemed necessary to the dignity of a lady whose daughter was entering on the important career that was opening out before Christine.

"I really believe you would have liked the girl to marry Albert Palmer," she went on in an aggrieved voice, as her husband did not reply.

"You quite mistake me," he answered patiently. "She didn't appear to wish it herself; but I am not sure it would not have been best if she had remained quietly with us till she saw some one in her own rank of life whom she did wish to marry."

"Own rank of life, indeed!" repeated Mrs. Ransome, indignantly. "Well, I never! And do you mean to tell me that this Lady Loder——" But her husband had taken up his hat, and had departed to his office.

The money for Christine's ticket had been rather a difficulty, and Mr. Ransome had suggested that she could very well travel second class; but this proposal was scouted by the ladies of the family. That

Christine should alight from a second-class carriage, possibly in the presence of Lady Loder, certainly in that of Lady Loder's footman, was manifestly not to be thought of; so a compromise was effected, and a second-class ticket was taken to within one station of London, where a first-class place was to be secured for the rest of the journey.

It was, therefore, with every propriety of appearance that Christine stepped on to the platform, and was carried off in Lady Loder's brougham to Hertford Street. She had been in a state of wild excitement all day; the Ransomes were not an attached family, and though the girls would say "dear mamma" when they were on company manners, and Mrs. Ransome would call them "my darling children" when talking of them to strangers, there was not much real, deep affection among them, and

no heartrending regrets on either side embittered the parting. It had cost Christine very little to leave her relations; the journey had amused her; her first sight of the London streets was entrancingly delightful, and it was not till the carriage stopped at Lady Loder's door that she thought of feeling anxious about the effect she would make on her first appearance in her new home. Her heart beat fast as she walked upstairs, but even then curiosity nearly overcame her nervousness. Lady Loder came to meet her as she was ushered into the drawing-room, and kissed her kindly.

"Well, Christine," she said, "I am glad you are come; I hope we shall be happy together. Let me look at you, child;" and she led her to the window (for it was getting dusk) and scrutinized her narrowly. "Yes, yes! you will do; I do

not repent of having asked you. At one time I was half afraid; but I am quite content now I see you."

From this speech it will be concluded that Lady Loder had no theories of education which involved keeping a young lady's vanity in abeyance; indeed, any theory that demanded reticence in her conversation would have been highly inconvenient to her. She was in the habit of saying, on all subjects, exactly what came into her head; sometimes the remarks she would make were so candid as to amount to rudeness, but they were uttered in a manner so open, and unconscious of the possibility of offending, that for the most part people laughed and did not mind.

Christine was surprised, but not displeased; she was quite open to the charm of the order, cleanliness, and comfort of the room; she thought Lady Loder an

agreeable-looking, handsome old lady, and she was well satisfied with her prospective lot. No spots on the table-cloths, no patches in the chair-covers, no rusty black caps, no shoes mended with court-plaister, no cameo brooches,—what could any one want more? Her hostess settled her in an armchair near the fire, and talked to her about the journey; but there was a question which interested her more, and by-and-by she asked it, going, as was her wont, straight to the point. "Well, I dare say you'll be very happy going out with Maude and me, though no doubt you will feel strange at first; you will find the society very different to what you have been in at Falconbridge," she said. "I suppose, child, that you are not engaged to any one there?"

"No," answered Christine, sipping her tea with inward satisfaction—tea with real

cream, not bluish skim-milk; "but I might have been. It was only a fortnight ago that I had an offer from a gentleman who has a place three miles out of Falconbridge."

Oh, Christine, Christine! The "place three miles out of Falconbridge," but no mention of the shop in Falconbridge!

"Really!" said Lady Loder; "and you refused him?"

"Yes."

"That is right; but you mustn't talk about it. It doesn't matter mentioning it to me; but it wouldn't be thought at all the right thing to speak of it to any one else. I suppose you have not been out much?"

"A little, chiefly in the town; but mamma knows a great many of the county people, and last winter she and papa dined at the lord-lieutenant's."

"My dear! pray don't say such awful things: how shall I make you understand! Never in social matters say anything in order to assert your position; it is much the safest way, for then people give you credit for everything of that sort. Don't let me hear anything more about 'county families' and 'lord-lieutenants,' I beseech you!"

Poor Christine felt dreadfully humiliated; for the moment she quite hated Lady Loder; but still she had sense enough to resolve to profit by her advice. There was a painful silence. The elder lady was half repenting the step she had taken, in adopting a girl from a provincial town; the younger was smarting under the reprimand she had received, and thinking that if every one in London were as critical as this, there would soon be a very scanty number of subjects left to talk about.

"Do you happen ever to have met my cousin, Maude Loder, who is coming to live with me?"

"No." Christine's imagination at once set to work to picture this rival in her career. It was hardly probable that she would be as pretty as herself, but she might be better versed in the ways of the world, and in that awful list of things to be said and things not to be said; and she would almost certainly be better dressed, and more accomplished. Perhaps Christine would be able to make use of her; she could usually pick up things quickly, and she would try and learn the edicts of this new world in which she was to live, though of course without disclosing that she was so doing. And then her thoughts reverted to the two speeches for which she had been reproved. She remembered that when last year Lucy Skipton told all her

friends in a whisper that she had refused Tom Fuller, she rose at once three degrees in their estimation; and that Mrs. Ellis had smiled with unusual affability upon her mother and herself when they had called, after the dinner at Lord Damer's—ostensibly to bring a parcel of knitted shawls for the poor, but really to drop a word about the party, because, as Mrs. Ransome said, "she rather imagined Mrs. Ellis fancied they didn't move in the same set as herself, which was quite a mistake." It was very odd: what could be the difference? But then it occurred to her that the whisper in the one case and the pretext required in the other showed that the actors in the scenes were half ashamed of their doings, and she concluded that in more refined society, the shame increased and the whisper deepened into silence.

In the midst of her reverie the door

opened, and "Miss Loder" was announced. Christine eyed her critically, and was not pleased with what she saw. It was clear that she herself did not even decidedly bear off the palm for looks. Maude was unquestionably lovely in her black suit, with the little velvet hat and ostrich-feathers perched on the top of her auburn curls. She was painfully shy; the tears stood on her eyelashes; her cheeks were flushed, and her voice trembled.

Lady Loder made none of the frank remarks on her appearance with which she had greeted Christine, but introduced the two girls to each other, and then proceeded to pour out tea for the new-comer.

The talk flagged sadly, for any allusion to the home she had left brought a great lump into Maude's throat; and what little was said was mostly between Lady Loder and Christine.

When Maude had quite finished her tea, her cousin made a move, and remarking that both travellers would probably like to go up and rest, she led the way to two charming, bright little rooms on the third floor, where, having looked around to see that they had all they wanted, she left them.

Poor Maude sat down on the sofa and rested her head on her hands. "Oh, I shall never be able to live here; I am so miserable—so miserable!" she said softly. "I want Aunt Ellen. Oh! why do people die?" And then she cried and sobbed till the bell rang, and she had barely time to sponge her eyes and make herself fit to be seen at dinner.

Christine had been much more agreeably employed. She was delighted with her room, and had been investigating every corner of it, wondering all the time, with

a pleased wonder, if she should ever have things enough to fill that big wardrobe. Then she imagined herself dressing for a ball in front of the cheval-glass. She would have a white gown with lilies; no, roses would be prettier, or acacia; and then, in the small hours of the morning, she would come back and lie down in that springy, soft bed, with a murmur of compliments and dance music running in her head. And then she thought of the small untidy room at Falconbridge which she shared with Beatrix; of the threadbare carpet, the iron-moulded dimity curtains, the painted wash-hand-stand, and the square of yellow soap. And then she remembered that in July she would be obliged to go back to it all; and a wild desire awoke in her mind to escape from it somehow, anyhow—best of all, by a good marriage; and as she sat in the armchair and reflected on these

things, she too heard the bell, and had to jump up and hurry on her evening toilette.

The two girls, fearful of being late, met in the drawing-room before their hostess came down, but did not make much advance towards friendship. Maude was shy, and Christine, who was not shy, did not know what to say to one who was so evidently unhappy as her companion; so they had not got further than making a place for each other near the fire, and commenting on the cold of the evening, when Lady Loder appeared.

She was more than ever struck with her *protégées* now she saw them without their out-of-door things; it was hard to decide which was most beautiful, for, though both tall and slight, there was not a resemblance between them. "We shall be a very well-looking trio," thought the old lady, as she stood beside them in her black satin and

old lace. "It is a comfort that that girl has the knack of dressing, at any rate. As to the things she says, we must break her of them somehow."

## CHAPTER V.

"... Duty?—'tis to take on trust
What things are good, and right, and just;
And whether indeed they be or be not,
Try not, test not, see not, feel not:
'Tis walk and dance, sit down and rise
By leading; open ne'er your eyes."

CLOUGH.

THE next few days were spent in shopping diligently on behalf of the girls, and then came the drawing-room at which they were presented. Even Christine's appetite for dress and jewellery could not support her flagging spirits till the end of that long and dreary day.

Of course there was a north-east wind, and the rooms at the Palace were bitterly cold; of course every one looked pinched

and blue, and the masses of smart clothes overpowered and extinguished each other; of course everybody was too absorbed in thinking whether some one else was or was not standing on their lace, to be at all pleasant; and of course, when it was over, they had to wait two hours for their carriage. Are not these things always so? why need we go into further detail?

A day or two later Christine realized her dream of dressing in white tulle and lilies before the cheval-glass, for Mrs. Mortimer had asked them to her ball, and they were both to go.

Each girl had a piece of advice before starting. "Maude, you must learn to speak more: I don't want you to chatter, but really you are too silent."

And Maude had meekly responded, "Yes, Cousin Mary."

Christine had her word in private just

before they went downstairs. "Now, child, you mustn't be angry; but I recommend you not to talk much to the ladies to whom I introduce you. You have brought a quantity of extraordinary phrases with you from the country, and though you are sharp and quick, and are getting out of them already, you had better follow my suggestions and talk chiefly to the men. They don't notice such things half as much."

A vexed flush rose to Christine's cheek; but she was growing used to Lady Loder's blunt speeches, and besides, having herself some share of the old lady's worldly wisdom, she had soon perceived that her best policy lay in striving to follow her advice; so she swallowed her mortification, and said, "Very well; I'll remember."

"You must not seem as if you did not care to speak to them—that never looks

well in a girl; but you must just bow and smile and look interested, and say a very few words and pass on. Oh! and there is another thing you might possibly do. Don't take your partner's arm between the turns in the valses. He won't offer it; and you mustn't do like a girl I saw in the country, who clung on to her partner's arm, although he left it hanging straight by his side in hopes of getting rid of her. That would be fatal!"

"Thank you," said Christine, with a sudden fit of gratitude. She certainly might have made this mistake.

"And now I think we are ready," pursued her chaperon; and they all rustled downstairs and into the carriage.

Five minutes' drive brought them to Mrs. Mortimer's, and in as many more they had been presented to the lady of the house and were in the scene of action.

It rather surprised Christine that, though a valse was going on, and there were more than twenty girls standing still, there were at least six young men in the doorway, who were eyeing the company superciliously, as if, having taken stock of their own charms, they were watching to see when some one would come in who would be worthy of the honour of dancing with them. Presently the tallest of them looked their way, then put up a glass and surveyed them with deliberation, and finally made his way to Lady Loder, and shook her by the hand.

"How do you do?" he said. "I haven't seen you since the day of the wedding. Have you heard from Mrs. Carew lately?"

"Yes," replied Lady Loder; "I had a letter from her yesterday. They seem to be very happy at Marston, and ten days hence they mean to be back in London."

"I must go and call as soon as they arrive. Their house is just opposite the Richards', is it not?"

"Yes. Will you let me introduce you to my cousin Miss Loder, and to Miss Ransome?—Mr. Willoughby."

The girls bowed, and the young man engaged Maude for the following dance.

"Lady Loder, may I introduce my boy to your young friend?" And a small fair youth of eighteen was brought up to Christine, who captivated him on the spot with her gracious smile.

Lady Loder seemed to know everybody; she went about the room shaking hands with the ladies, and apparently quite in her element. She was acquainted with all the young men as well, for they were most of them partners of Effie's, and every one seemed pleased to see her as she moved about from one to another.

"Are Miss Loder and Miss Ransome living with you?" asked Captain Hotham. He was too lazy to dance, and why he went to several balls every night it was difficult to understand. However, he was useful after his fashion, being one of those young men who devote themselves to the chaperons, and help them to while away the weary hours with small talk and supper.

"Yes," replied Lady Loder. "The aunt who brought my young cousin up died last autumn, and she is to make her home with me. Miss Ransome is going to stay with us till July, at any rate."

"They are a charmingly pretty pair."

"Are they not? I shall introduce you to them presently."

"Thanks; but I don't dance, you know."

"Oh, that doesn't matter."

"How do you do, Lady Loder?" said another manly voice. "Are those the two young ladies you took to the drawing-room, and who were said by *Veracity* and the *Universe* to be the beauties of the day? On my word, for once I agree with those public organs. Will you introduce me?"

"By all means, Mr. Hamilton."

"I've been away in Roumelia for a year since I saw you; it is quite a blessing to be back again in a civilized country. Now, don't look surprised! I flattered myself I was sufficiently a public character to have my departure noticed; and every one I meet says, 'Where have you been this last month? Any pleasant visits?' It is a painful discovery to find that not a soul has missed one." And so the little man rattled on, forming a rather refreshing contrast to Captain Hotham with his

weary-and-worn manner; and Lady Loder answered him with her usual ready, agreeable style.

There is nothing like a large visiting list, a fairly good temper, and an absence of all turn for analyzing character, for producing that benevolent indifference to one's fellow-creatures which is essential to the enjoyment of the sort of life led by Lady Loder. She had a few enemies whom she cordially disliked, and fewer friends whom she cordially loved, but she had a vast concourse of acquaintances whom she was always glad to see, and for whom she entertained the same kind of regard that a farmer feels for his sheep; they must be treated with a due amount of attention and care, they must receive a regulation return for what they give: honour and right feeling forbid that it should be otherwise, for they are excellent, useful,

estimable creatures, and so was last year's flock, and so will be that of next year.

Meanwhile, Maude was getting on excellently with her partner. She was one of those people who in a crowd lose all their usual shyness, and she and Mr. Willoughby were chatting away as if they had known each other all their lives. Lady Loder was quite satisfied with her behaviour as she looked at her across the room.

After the Lancers came a valse, for which a partner was found for each young lady, and by the time that was over it was evident that the two girls were attracting a good deal of attention.

The ladies on the raised benches were asking one another who they were, and the men had already mostly found out this fact for themselves. Mr. Hamilton came and reminded Lady Loder of her promise

to introduce him, and as he walked off with Maude, said, "You seem to be getting on so fast, that I felt it must be now or never."

Captain Hotham had several times separated his long back from the doorway against which he was leaning, and had several times dropped his eye-glass out of his eye, and sunk back into his former position, as if the undertaking he had resolved on was too arduous for him; but now, as he heard Christine say to young Barnett, "I'm sorry I'm engaged for that —yes, and for the one following: I've nothing free before the fourth dance," he braced himself for a final effort, and strolled up to Lady Loder, who at once introduced him to her charge.

"Let's see, this is a valse. Will you come down to supper with me after it's over, during the following dance?"

"I'm afraid I can't. I'm engaged."

"Ah! engaged" (with a drawl). "Then you won't come?"

"I really can't."

"Ah!"

Christine looked at him and nearly laughed. Captain Hotham thought her rather a mistake; there could be no one present worth dancing with, when she might go to supper with him! However, she was certainly pretty, and there was some one else waiting to ask her to dance, so it was worth the trouble of keeping her attention; yes, and even of making a great sacrifice for her.

"Will you give me a quadrille, then?"

"Certainly."

Standing with seven other people on a piece of parquet about five feet square, was a form of dancing which exactly suited Captain Hotham. There was one

energetic lady opposite who appeared to have a strong sense of duty, and much perseverance in endeavouring to fulfil it; but, excepting when she insisted on making a move, the whole set remained still.

"I never dance; haven't danced these seven years; it's against my principles," remarked he.

"Then why are you dancing now?"

"Ah! likes compliments" (to himself—then aloud). "Don't you know, Miss Ransome, there are some things that tempt a man to break his principles?"

"But that's very naughty; at least, without there's some very strong reason."

"Which in this case I had."

"Really! What was that?"

"Pretty well for a beginner" (aside—then to her). "You'll be angry if I tell you."

No, I shan't."

"Beautiful dark-blue eyes, and dimples."

"Oh! Captain Hotham. Now, you shouldn't."

"So you are angry after all. Let us talk of something else. Have you been long in London?"

"No; not a fortnight yet."

"Ah!"

"I think it's a delightful place."

"Ah!"

"Only the number of people one sees, and the quantity of pretty girls, make one feel so insignificant."

("At it again," thought her partner.) "I cannot believe that *you* can feel insignificant anywhere," he replied.

"Oh dear, indeed I do," she returned, in a pretty, pleading way. "Now, look at that lady with the diamonds in the doorway; isn't she enough to make me feel small?"

"In one sense, yes."

"Oh! in every way."

"Only your extreme humility would make you say so."

"Mamma used to call me a vain little thing."

"But mammas make mistakes sometimes."

"Mine is very clever."

"I'm sure she must be."

"Why? you don't know her at all!"

"But I know her daughter!" A pause. "Is Miss Loder staying in Hertford Street?"

"Yes. Oh, she is such a sweet girl!"

"Ah!"

"I'm sure she will be very much admired."

("Where did this young woman turn up from, I wonder?" thought the gentleman.) "Pretty and sweet," he said.

"A rare combination. She will deserve it."

"Oh! Captain Hotham," with a shocked face.

"Don't you think she will deserve it?"

"I didn't mean that; I meant, are not pretty girls usually good?"

"You generalize too quickly from your own case," he said.

"Yes," she replied, drooping her eyelashes, without the slightest idea of what he meant, but taking the remark as a reproof which ought to be assented to modestly. He thought her a curious being enough, but rather amusing to talk to; and having once brought himself to transgress his rules, he engaged Maude for the following dance.

"Dancing is quite against my principles; I haven't danced these seven years."

"So, as they say we all change com-

pletely in seven years, I suppose you are going to try whether your present self likes it any better than your last self?"

"Ah, no! I don't think it is that."

"Don't you like dancing?"

"I don't know. You see, I've a great deal of hard work; there's drill, and all that."

"Oh, I understand; no wonder you are too tired."

He looked at her to see if she was laughing; but no, she was perfectly grave.

"How long have you been in London?"

"Nearly a fortnight. I never was here before"—she did not notice his slight start of horror—"and I've hardly seen anything of it yet but a small part of the West-end."

"Are you thinking of performing a pilgrimage to the East-end?" he asked, with an accent of contempt.

"Yes, I hope so," she replied. "I want to see it all by degrees."

"Why, this one is more wonderful than the last!" he thought.

"I and my maid did find out quite a new street yesterday," she went on, innocent of the impression she was making on her companion; "it was a long narrow one, with nothing but bird-cage shops; the houses looked so dark and wretched, and there was not a tree or flower in sight."

"My grandmother had a story of a woman from one of those places going down to the country for a day's outing, and being surprised to find that apples grew on trees, and not in rows on the ground like cabbages."

"How shocking!"

"Shocking? Stupid, I call it."

"Does no one near London ever invite them down to a picnic or anything, so

that they may see the common country sights for themselves. It all strikes me as so odd here, and so different to my old home, that no one should look after any one."

"Oh, there are the poor's-rates, and the charity organization society, and the sisterhoods. Excellent things sisterhoods; do for the ugly women to go into."

Maude did not answer. If Lady Loder could have heard her, she would have had a lecture on her ball-room conversation. She had this time gone very far wrong, indeed, and Captain Hotham's face showed it. He was dreadfully bored with her.

"I suppose she's a philanthropist, and a ritualist, and a woman's rights girl, and all the rest of it," he thought lazily. He was not given to accurate classification, and the above substantives he used vaguely to himself as rather indefinite terms of

reproach. "She's awfully good-looking, but not my sort, and I should think she has a temper."

As they drove home Lady Loder congratulated the girls on having quite satisfied her with their behaviour. Maude had never seemed at a standstill for talk, and Christine had looked charming, and, as far as could be judged at a distance, had conducted herself to perfection. Lady Loder had had a further gratification, which she did not impart to them. Lady Eltonreigh, who had that beautiful house overlooking the park, and who gave those first-rate concerts with all the best singers (and all the smartest people), had asked her to come to her music next week, and bring the girls. The invitation was mentioned, but not the fact that she had hitherto received cards only for the drums that were held at intervals to "wipe off" the rank

and file of Lady Eltonreigh's acquaintance.

"That is the use of your being both so pretty," said she in high good humour; "you are sure to be both asked to everything."

As Maude was slowly taking off her wreath, and thinking that balls were great fun, and that she should like them still better when her partners treated her like an older friend, and conversed about some more interesting subjects than they had spoken of to-night, Christine came in in a pink dressing-gown, and rippling waves of shining hair all over her shoulders.

"Wasn't it heavenly, Maude?" she exclaimed.

"Delightful! I did enjoy it!" Maude answered heartily.

"I wish I could remember my partners' names. There was Mr. Denton twice, and

Mr. Hamilton, and Captain Hotham, and then a fair one whose name I did not hear; and Mr. Willoughby twice, and Sir Frederic Howell three times,—and I can't recollect the others. Who did you dance with?"

"Oh, a good many of the same; and two brothers of the name of Haseldine, whom Mr. Hamilton introduced, and some others."

"Do you know, Charlie Denton asked me for my photograph, and—and—— I should like to tell you something that Captain Hotham said, only you would think me vain."

"No, indeed; please tell me."

"He said I had beautiful dark-blue eyes, and charming dimples."

"Did he!" exclaimed Maude, with immense surprise.

"Yes;—why?"

"Only that I can't imagine him in that vein; he seemed to me quite different."

"And he said I was clever; at least, he implied it."

"Really? And did you find him clever?"

"Oh yes! I thought so; but, then, I am no judge, dear Maude."

"I dare say he is clever. I am afraid I haven't the knack of making people make the best of themselves."

"I heard something said of you."

"What?"

"Oh! I think I oughtn't to tell you, or you will grow conceited."

"Yes; I must know," said Maude, laughing. "What was it?"

"Lady Eltonreigh said to her neighbour, 'What a lovely girl that Miss Loder is! it is a real pleasure to look at anything so beautiful.'"

"Hurrah!" said Maude, gleefully. "I'm so glad! Just think of any one saying that of me! Still, it has its drawbacks too," she added, meditatively. "Think how disappointed with one people might be when they got to know one better. It might be as bad as Anne of Cleves and Henry VIII. in another way."

But Christine had never heard of Anne of Cleves, and did not care to pursue these sadder trains of thought.

"You lucky girl!" she exclaimed, "to have this future always before you, whilst, after July, poor little I shall have to go back to my chrysalis state."

"I think it is you who are a lucky girl to have a home to go to, and a mother and sisters. Sometimes I long so intensely for my home. Mr. Hamilton talked of our county to-night; he says he fished in the Thogart some years ago."

"Had you much going out there, and many pleasant neighbours?"

"We never went anywhere, and our only neighbour, besides the vicar and his wife, was Sir Walter Grenville."

"Oh," said Christine, with a new suspicion in her mind, which might account for her friend's occasional fits of depression; "was Lady Grenville nice?"

"There wasn't one; he was not married."

"Well, whoever lived with him to look after him—his sister or niece?"

"He hadn't any one to look after him. He's quite young; not much over twenty."

"Oh! I thought you said he was an old gentleman. Was he nice?"

"He hadn't been many months there before I left, and we had not seen very much of him."

Christine longed to ask more questions. She would have gone on cross-examining

Lucy Skipton without any hesitation; but, then, Maude was not like Lucy Skipton; there was something in her entire straightforwardness and simplicity that restrained her. The girls were perfectly happy together, but Christine felt that there were bounds which she dared not pass. She had described her companion to her mother as "proud:" a word that, with a certain set of people, includes the manner resulting from shyness, from personal dislike, from reserve, from dulness, from indolence, and nearly every quality rather than pride, which usually shows itself in quite a different way.

Maude had not made up her mind about Christine. She thought her very pretty and amiable; but her way of saying depreciating things of herself grew tiresome after a while, and sometimes suggested that she was trying to extract a

compliment; and then several times she had, when asked to give an opinion on different subjects, made such *mal-à-propos*, uncomprehending answers, that Maude did not know how to account for them.

For instance, one day Christine took up the *New Republic*, and read aloud the piece where the company discuss what is their "Aim in life." "What should you have said?" asked Maude; and Christine answered, "Aim in life? I don't exactly know what you mean. I haven't any particular aim that I know of. I suppose I shall stay at home as long as papa lives." "That's not what I mean. You must have some aim, if you come to think of it." And Christine drooped her long eyelashes over her beautiful eyes, and looked dreamy for a moment, and then said, "Well, I imagine mine is to get as much amusement as I can out of things—of

course, without doing anything wrong," she added, as she guessed from Maude's face that she had not said the right thing. "Oh no; surely not that," Maude had replied impulsively, and then she felt as if she could not explain; and when Christine inquired, without much interest, "Well, dear, and what should you have said?" she laughed, and answered lightly, "Oh, I don't know. It is too difficult to express; and, unfortunately, I'm like Moses, 'not eloquent.'"

## CHAPTER VI.

"From one stage of our being to the next
We pass unconscious o'er a slender bridge,
The momentary work of unseen hands,
Which crumbles down behind us. . . ."

LOWELL.

"EFFIE comes back to-morrow," said Lady Loder, one day at luncheon. "I think we must all go the day after and see her."

They found Mrs. Carew at home, sitting in the back dining-room, surrounded with boxes, parcels, shavings, and straw.

She was not a pretty woman; her face was too square, and her figure too thick for beauty; but she had a bright, intelligent countenance, and a pleasant manner. Perhaps, for the sake of absolute correct-

ness, it would be necessary to insert a qualifying clause, and say that, "when she was with people whom she liked," she had a pleasant manner, for at other times she could knit her brows and give curt rejoinders, in a fashion that prevented her from being generally popular.

The fact was that the eight years she had spent with Lady Loder had roused a spirit of opposition within her, which she did not always take pains to disguise. The whole tone of her aunt's house irritated her; she had strong opinions on many subjects, and, unfortunately, they were nearly always opposed to those current around her. She was far too outspoken; and, in moments of vexation, she would inveigh against Lady Loder's society, and call it aimless, frivolous, and tiresome. To these accusations her aunt would reply that: "Effie's own friends were the queerest-

looking folks she knew; where they came from she could not guess. It was evident that she had no appreciation for nice people;" and so on. The aunt would sometimes lament her niece's perversity in this respect to one of her own allies; and the niece had expressed in more open terms her conviction, nay, even her hope, that her aunt's friends would, now that she had gone to live in a small house in a distant street, drop her altogether.

However, all these ancient rubs were forgotten on the present occasion; nothing could be more cordial and pleasant than the greeting which she gave to her visitors. They discussed all the small events of her wedding trip with the utmost harmony, and afterwards she took them over the house, which had just been papered and painted, and promised to be very pretty when arranged.

"I wonder if it would bore you and Miss Ransome to come to-morrow morning and help me to unpack some of my china and ornaments?" she said. "I did not like to trust Sarah or the page to do it, and I want to have everything in order by luncheon time, because Maurice's clergyman-brother is coming to stay here."

"I am sure we can come," answered Maude; "we shall be very glad to help you;" and Christine, rousing herself at the idea of wedding presents, also expressed her willingness to assist.

The next day they were there by half-past ten, and worked hard all the morning, arranging Dresden mirrors, filling vases with flowers, and trying the furniture in various positions.

At last all was finished, Christine especially having greatly distinguished herself

by her cleverness and taste, and they sat down to rest.

"I could get quite engrossed in making my rooms pretty, and waste all my time on it," said Mrs. Carew. "I often wonder how much attention one may legitimately give to that sort of thing."

"At any rate, it is better than thinking perpetually of dress," replied Maude, reflecting on the many hours spent lately at Marshall's, Russell and Allen's, and Mme. Elise's.

"I am not quite sure," said Mrs. Carew. "It is a little better, no doubt; but not very much, I think."

Maude was surprised; she had thought Mrs. Carew would have had a soul above "the fashions."

"It rather depends why you dress well," she went on. "If it is from the motive of the person who said, 'It was quite a

mistake to think women dressed to please men; they did it to vex other women,' I certainly don't think it is at all defensible; but if you do it to gratify the eye of every man, woman, and child you meet, and still more, because, in the class to which we belong, a neglected exterior is a sure step towards forfeiting whatever good influence you might have, surely that alters the case?"

"But the hours and hours it takes!"

"Of course, it can be easily overdone; but a little organization in the shopping saves all that immensely. Do you remember the quotation in Bacon's Essays, 'Whosoever delighteth in solitude is either a wild beast or a god'? I always think that remark applies even more to a disregard of personal appearance. One must have reached a state of superhuman exaltation before one can venture to neglect it

on one's own account, or other people's. What do you think, Christine?"

"I agree with you, Mrs. Carew. People who live in London, and go out much, must dress well. It matters less in the country."

"I like putting on the smart clothes when they are there, as much as anybody; it is the trouble of getting them that I hate and grudge," said Maude.

"You must bear it in a martyr spirit, and remember what I think John Stuart Mill said; namely, that a vast number of women have no other mental or moral discipline than the effort of arranging about their dress, and the discomfort of submitting to its cramping and compressing form, so that the suffering of various kinds, entailed by the demands of fashion, is worth keeping up for their sakes."

"I certainly never thought of that

before," said Maude. "Still, at best, it is not a very high form of self-discipline to smile through life in a scratchy collar, pointed shoes, a suffocating waistband, and perpetual gloves."

"Don't despise it too much; it reaches just the people whom no other would touch, and gives them a habit of endurance that, when opportunity offers, may be turned to better account. If the fashion of tea-gowns and slippers spreads, female nature will be weakened by having no longer to 'souffrir pour être belle.'"

Christine was rather relieved when the door was opened, and Mr. Carew was announced.

The young man who entered was about twenty-eight years old, of middle height, and dressed in ordinary clerical clothes; he was thin and active-looking, with quick eyes that roamed about and seemed to take

in all about him. Of course the house was exhibited to him, and he was highly appreciative of its merits, praising here, suggesting a small alteration there, and delighting Christine by saying, with a laugh, as he stood before the tall vase of flowers which she had dressed with flowers and foliage, "My dear Effie, that vase gives me a new insight into your character: you must be an artist, and a poet, and a botanist, all in one, to have thought of those combinations;" and Mrs. Carew replied, "Don't think you have gained so many-sided a relation; your compliments are due to Miss Ransome, who filled that vase, and all in a few moments." At which the young man looked with evident admiration at the fair florist, who blushed and smiled.

"When will the alterations be finished at the rectory?" inquired Mrs. Carew.

"Not till August, I am afraid; country workmen are slow, and there is a great deal to do."

"And are you getting on with your shopping?"

"Yes, such as it is. But I haven't been making amusing purchases; second-hand shops in Tottenham Court Road, and the lowest prices in Heal's catalogue, don't furnish a very magnificent array of goods."

"Oh, I know you; you always run down your own things. By the time you have painted the door-panels, and carved the bookcases, and arranged your library, the place will look like a palace. Have you been spending the whole morning in Tottenham Court Road?"

"I was there from the time the shops opened till half-past twelve; and then I went to my lodging, and seeing the 'Mill

in the Floss' on the table, passed an hour with Sister Glegg and Sister Pullet."

"What a confession for a respectable clergyman! By-the-by, Edward, you know I was writing a novel. Well, I've thrown it into the fire, and never mean to put pen to paper again."

"Why?"

"For a variety of reasons: first, every one who knew what I was doing said, 'Why don't you put Amelia, or Frederick, or Stephen (as the case might be), into your book?—but perhaps you have;' and this made me sure they would find names for each of my characters, and then Amelia, and Frederick, and Stephen would be offended."

"A very insufficient reason," said Mr. Carew. "Go on to 'second.'"

"Second," continued Effie, "they always say of every woman of their acquaintance

who writes a novel, 'Ah, I'm sure that Mr. A. is that Mr. B. who was so much with them at Baden; you see, it is just her own story.' Now, that is detestable."

"Detestable, but also insufficient."

"Then, really, though I had always laughed at books about hair with 'tawny sheen,' and ladies with 'billowy drapery,' and men with 'dashing manners,' and 'sunshine glinting on exquisite spangles of dew,' I couldn't get on with the small allowance of epithets which my principles allowed me. And then I grew tired of the everlasting love-making, and my adjectives expressive of admiration ran short: adjectives clearly are my stumbling-block."

"We haven't come to any difficulty yet that seems insurmountable. For example, you might begin another which should not be full of love-making."

"But that would be quite unusual; that

is what they are always about," said Christine.

"Very often, but not necessarily. There is the sensation novel, with two forgeries, a suicide, and a murder: we should not look for much excitement beyond a graphic narrative of these thrilling events. Then there is the novel where portraiture and development of character are the chief object."

"Yes," said Maude; "in those there must be room left for the description of all the other forces which influence character as well."

"Exactly," he replied. "And then there are the sketchy pictures of every-day life: those don't require highly piled adjectives or very much love-making."

"No," said Effie, "perhaps not; but you can't deny it is what the interest consists of in nearly all the books. Do you know

Bessie Monk? She told me that her little sister asked her all sorts of questions after her first ball; and when she had heard all there was to tell about the dresses and the people, she said, 'But, Bessie, it isn't kind of you to keep secrets from me; who proposed to you?' It turned out that she had been taking a surreptitious course of the novels which came down from Mudie's, and the result was that she thought a ball without at least one proposal was an impossibility."

"She really was almost justified," said Maude; "one would quite form that impression from the stories we have had in Hertford Street lately."

"What a tremendously interesting and improving thing a good novel is!" said Mr. Carew.

"Really," said Christine, with her pretty appealing glance, "are any novels useful?

I thought that for improvement one must read history."

"Novels are history."

This time Christine looked not only appealing, but a good deal bewildered.

"I believe," Mr. Carew continued, "if a person had been brought up in solitude, with only one class of books at his command, he would emerge much more fit to live in the world, if he had been brought up on novels, than on history."

"Oh, Mr. Carew!" exclaimed Christine.

"Well, you see, ancient history wouldn't be much practical guide to him. It would be superfluous, for example, to melt the Alps with vinegar, now that we have the Mont Cenis Tunnel; and even modern history deals chiefly with the exceptional acts of exceptional men, with whom the greater part of humanity don't come in contact."

"Now, Edward, you are getting paradoxical as usual."

"No, I am not. Why should I know about Burke, Pitt, and Fox, when the nearest approach I shall ever make to such men will be when I go to the Chancellor's some day, and am refused a big living? But Brown, Jones, and Robinson are people I meet every day; and so are Kate Coventry, and Nancy and Rawdon Crawley. Even if they never had any objective reality, their lives are much more usefully historical to me than those of the above-mentioned politicians."

Maude laughed; but Christine looked quite dazed.

"He doesn't often talk such nonsense as that," said Effie to her; and while he was defending himself, the door opened, and the page came to say that "Lady Loder had called for the young ladies," and then there had to be a hurried collecting of gloves, veils, and wraps, and a hasty

leave-taking, with promises to come again soon.

"What very pretty girls! Are they sisters?" inquired Mr. Carew, as they left the room.

"No, only distant cousins. The blue-eyed one is a Miss Ransome, and I believe her grandfather and Maude Loder's grandmother were brother and sister. They are my successors in Hertford Street. I am sure my aunt must be delighted to have them."

"Miss Ransome is quite charming; so quick and bright, as well as pretty."

"Yes, she is very pretty." Mrs. Carew reserved her opinion of Christine's intelligence.

But Christine was, in fact, not the least deficient in brains. On the subjects commonly discussed at Falconbridge, the price of meat, the iniquities of the servants, the

proper cut of a skirt, or the gossip of the town, she could well hold her own. But as to anything more, her education had not enabled her to form an opinion. Mrs. Ransome took in the *Queen*, Mrs. Ellis sometimes lent them a number of the *Cornhill*, and they had a few old volumes of "Good Words" on a shelf; but this did not furnish a wide range of literature. Their only other book was an illustrated copy of "Hudibras," which had been a wedding present of Mr. Ransome's, and now lay on the same little table as Mrs. Ransome's "Photographic Album." That lady dipped now and then into the pages next the pictures, and once confided to Mrs. Skipton, that: "she thought it a very odd book to have been written by the author of the 'Analogy,' which she had looked at, at Springby's, after Mr. Ellis had mentioned it in a sermon, but had not

bought because it seemed so dull;" and Mrs. Skipton, who had never heard of "Hudibras" or the "Analogy," and who was suspected of a leaning towards dissent, had replied, that: "in her opinion, it was very wrong indeed of the vicar to recommend books by questionable authors, and from the pulpit, too!"

"Miss Loder is pretty, too, but rather cold in her manner; don't you think so?" said Mr. Carew after a pause.

"I shouldn't have said so," replied Effie; "I feel most attracted towards her."

"Oh, do you? Miss Ransome is so gentle, and looks so well when she is shy."

"I don't consider her a shy person."

"Evidently you don't like her, Effie."

"Indeed I do. Is it such a merit to be shy?"

Mr. Carew did not care to begin one of the sparring-matches which were fre-

quent between him and his sister-in-law. "Oh no; I suppose not. Now tell me where you advise me to go for saucepans;" and the conversation turned on domestic matters till Edward Carew took his departure.

"I really believe Edward is half smitten with Christine," thought Effie. "I expect she will be very taking to men; that diffident way of looking up from under her long eyelashes is irresistible. Maude won't be half as popular. Honesty may be the best policy in large matters, but I am sure it is not so, as far as winning golden opinions goes. It is just Christine's tiny dishonesties that make her liked. I can see she often looks interested and convinced, when she doesn't even in the least understand; and I am sure she is one of those persons who rush to do things for other people, which they would much rather

do for themselves, just to be thought good-natured; and always disclaim any compliment that is paid them on a quality which they especially pique themselves on possessing, in order to show their humility. Well, I mustn't dawdle here; I'll have a walk, and then come in and read."

So much for Mrs. Carew's reflections.

Her brother-in-law's were different. As he walked to the ironmonger's he had a vision of a slim figure, with a dimpled face, and smiling rosy lips. As he bought the saucepans he felt sure he was choosing the wrong ones—men did not understand such things; and as he returned home, the picture which he called up of the rectory seemed bare, and empty of something besides furniture.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Nothing paralyzes the mind like the accepted habit of doing nothing. Life at. . . is wonderful in this respect—one has nothing to do, and yet never an instant to call his own. It is idleness organized."
—HENRI PERREYVE.

ON several occasions Maude had consulted her cousin as to the possibility of undertaking some work in the parish; but Lady Loder looked upon her aspirations as part of the "tiresome, restless ways of the nineteenth century," and did not encourage them. Indeed, had she tried, she would have found it very difficult to suggest anything for the girl to do, and she was not acquainted with the clergyman of her own or any neighbouring parish who might

have helped her. "We will see about it; we will try and hear of something," she said when next Maude referred to the subject; "but really, I cannot imagine why you must be poking about among the poor people: do stay in your proper sphere, like a lady," she added, with a touch of irritation, which with her was very rare. She was an easy-tempered woman, seldom vexed with anything; but it was annoying to see Maude taking to Effie's tiresome ways. Effie, indeed, had set her aunt's authority at defiance, and had gone off to "fidget about" in Lambeth; but Lady Loder was not going to tolerate such nonsense in Maude; she was far too young and too striking-looking to be able to do such things.

However, Maude could not reconcile her life of total uselessness, as she called it, to her conscience; and being quite un-

aware of the difficulties which attend such work in London, she thought that, as no one seemed likely to find anything for her to do, she had better seek something for herself; and perhaps it would be as well to begin with a little visiting among the poor. She had a general permission to walk by herself, in the morning, in the quieter parts of Mayfair, so one day she sallied forth to make her first experiment.

She directed her steps towards an archway she had often noticed in her walks, which apparently led into a number of small streets, and passing through it, found herself in what bade fair to be a desirable field for her missionary efforts.

The houses were low and dark; the middle of the narrow roadway was filled with barrows loaded with flabby-looking cabbages, ancient fish, and dried-up walnuts; round these played some dirty, half-

dressed children; and a party of untidy, bonnetless women stood about, exchanging jokes and loud laughter with some idle lads who were leaning against the doorway of a public-house, with their thumbs in their armholes, and short clay pipes in their mouths.

This evidently was a region sadly in need of some reforming influence. Maude paused before a shop where old iron was sold. Rusty locks, drawer-handles, queer antiquated keys, and such-like goods filled the dingy window. Why not make her first call here? She entered. There was no one in the shop, but she heard sounds in the room beyond and passed in. A big rough woman was buttoning the ragged frock of a very unattractive little child.

"And what may your business be?" she inquired in no gentle tones as Maude appeared.

"I thought I would come and pay you a little visit," replied the girl, rather frightened. She was accustomed to be received with smiles and pleased welcome in the cottages at home; but this woman did not seem in the least gratified by her call.

"We don't want no visitors here," remarked the mistress of the domain; "we keeps ourselves to ourselves, we do. Will you please to walk into the shop?"

"Have you a large family?" asked Maude, bent on making herself agreeable, but retreating before the gaunt figure.

"What be our fam'ly to you?" returned the woman. "Webster!"—and here a grimy-faced man appeared through a low door—"here is a young lady come to call."

"With what can I oblige you, my dear?" asked the new arrival with an unpleasant grin. "Anything in our line

to-day? This is one of the first establishments in London."

"No, I don't want anything, thank you," said Maude, getting very frightened. "I wished to pay some visits in the street, that was all; I will go."

But Mr. Webster closed the door, and noisily turned the key in it. "I really must show you our goods first," he said, with a hideous smile; "I shouldn't be doing you justice if I let you leave without making a small purchase. Now, this here hinge—*bonâ fide* old Nuremberg; take that before you go."

"Very well," said Maude, feeling that there was no escape. "How much is it?"

"Thirty-five shillings," replied her tormentor. "Dirt cheap at the money!"

"It isn't worth anything of the kind," retorted Maude; "I won't have it."

But Webster stood between her and the

door. "I couldn't let you lose such a chance; it would be a sin. I will put it up for you. Hannah, my dear, give me a wrapper;" and in a moment it was enveloped in a sheet of *Reynolds's Newspaper*, and thrust into her hand. There was no help for it. She took out her purse, counted the thirty-five shillings, and with another grim smile, and "Many thanks, miss; please to patronize us again," she was allowed to depart.

Very thankful she was to find herself once more in the open air; she had been thoroughly terrified, and her knees trembled so that she could hardly walk. Without making any more philanthropic efforts, she regained a more respectable quarter, and when her fears were over, could not help laughing as the ridiculous side of her expedition struck her. That she had been thoroughly taken in there could be no

doubt. There she stood, with a rusty old hinge in her hand, which would have been dear at eighteen-pence, and her purse was lightened of thirty-five shillings. Well, if the iron was not worth the difference, perhaps the experience was. She resolved not to mention what had occurred to Lady Loder, but she could not refrain from telling Christine, who was frightfully shocked, and very proudly superior at having never got into any such scrape herself.

"Pray, never do such a thing again. Promise me, dearest Maude," she said.

"No," replied her companion; "I have had enough of the back alleys. I think it will be a better plan to visit a ward in a hospital. I shall go and see about it some day."

"Ah! what dangers there are in London!" sighed Christine, sententiously.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"A chance had brought us together,
Our talk was of matters of course;
We were nothing one to another
But a short half-hour's resource."

LOWELL.

LADY LODER had decided that it was right and necessary to give a dinner in honour of the bride and bridegroom, and the date was now come for which it had been fixed.

Late in the afternoon of that day, two men were sauntering along Pall Mall in earnest conversation.

"Well, Simmonds," the elder man was saying, "of course you will do as you like; but, considering all things, I advise you to turn it over in your mind."

The brow of the younger man clouded. "I don't think there's ready enough," he replied. "Find me a real heiress, and I'm prepared; though, by Jove! shouldn't I hate it! But this girl isn't an heiress at all."

"Well, perhaps hardly; but from what I can hear, she has fifteen hundred a year in land, and thirty thousand pounds besides; and really, unless you do something, I don't know what will happen!"

"I'm sure I don't, Martin. The governor's cleaned out, so there's nothing to be had in that quarter; and I can't get anything more from Myers."

"When once the state of your affairs is known, you'll have every one down upon you."

"What a fool I was to throw over my Manchester heiress! I thought I could do without her when old Simmonds died and

left me some cash; and now the money's gone, and the heiress too."

"It was a pity, certainly; but now you must try again."

"It's no use; if the girl would marry me, her guardians wouldn't let her."

"I think your chance of being Lord Munstock some day would go a long way with Lady Loder; and I don't suppose she has heard the report of the present man's French actress wife. Besides, I dare say there is no truth in the story."

"You know as well as I that I shall never be Lord Munstock. I never saw such a fellow as you to give bad advice, Martin."

"Well," said the other, "turn conscientious if you like; but what about the bills?"

"Your plan is utterly impracticable, I tell you; and besides, this girl's fresh

from the country. What on earth could I say to her? I can't talk about dairies and Sunday schools."

"Oh, that won't do," responded Martin. "You know very well there never was a woman you couldn't get on with yet. If it depended on dairies and Sunday schools, I would back you to know the best receipts for making butter, and imparting the catechism, long before eight o'clock to-night. Miss Loder's awfully pretty, too."

"Oh, I've seen her. She's pretty, certainly, but not my sort. Well, good-bye. I'm going to see if Slade is here." And so saying, he ran up the club steps, and Hubert Martin pursued his way alone to the gunshop.

Eustace Simmonds was a man of about thirty, with very short black hair, strongly marked eyebrows, and a face of not more than average good looks. He had not

many intimate men-friends; he was not what is called a "good fellow"—not cheerful, genial, and communicative enough; but he was thought pleasant in general society, and was always popular with women. Just now he was terribly under water with regard to money. His father had paid his debts once, and had distinctly refused to entertain any further applications. His salary from his place in a Government office was quite insufficient to meet his expenses, and the possibility of the future peerage and property, on which the Jews had made him some advances, had become ineffectual as a further source of supply, from a rumour that had crept over from Paris, to the effect that old Lord Munstock (who had long ago ceased to be the obliging relation from whom Eustace had expectations; and become the tiresome old uncle who

wouldn't die) had some years back married an "artiste" from one of the theatres, and that there were two or three little boys who would effectually stand in the way of his inheritance.

Hubert Martin had been his evil genius all his life. They had been in every sort of scrape together at Oxford; then they had travelled together, and had got into still more discreditable troubles over a game of cards, at a German watering-place. There had been a dispute, and a threatened duel, and the rights of the story never quite came out; but men fought rather shy of them for a time. Since then the incident had been a good deal forgotten, and they had knocked about in London, doing no particular good, and spending a great deal more money than they had.

Now, at length, Eustace's creditors were

pressing hard on him, and there seemed no way out of the difficulty, except by a marriage with a girl with money. He was extremely averse to the step; but, as Hubert Martin had said, "What about the bills?"

He pondered over the matter as he sat in the smoking-room of the club waiting for Slade, and seeing no other resource open to him, resolved to see what he could do with Miss Loder that night at her cousin's dinner. If he could hold out a prospect of a rich marriage, those confounded Jews would probably consent to wait.

Meantime, the unsuspecting victim of this plot was helping Lady Loder to arrange how the guests were to go down to dinner.

"My cousin, Lord Glamorgan, will sit at the bottom of the table, and will take

Lady Eltonreigh; I shall have Lord Eltonreigh; Mr. Fairbank will take Christine, and Captain Hotham you. I think the other couples are right. Yes, they are," she continued, glancing her eye down the list. "If they all sit as I intend, you will have Mr. Simmonds on the other side."

"Mr. Simmonds? Who is he?"

"He is the eldest son of old Mr. Simmonds, of Moreton, and a great friend of mine." (The number of Lady Loder's "great friends" was legion). "They say he has run through his money rather fast; but he is immensely pleasant and chatty. Shall we have tea? Where's Christine?"

Maude ran upstairs to fetch her, but found the door locked, and no admittance. "She was coming directly, and hoped they wouldn't wait for her." So Maude went down again.

The fact was, that a new light had

struck Christine. She had been meditating deeply on the luncheon-party at Mrs. Carew's, and had come to the conclusion that she was under-educated, and must try and teach herself something.

She did not feel this when talking to Lady Loder. Indeed, she now got on excellently with her hostess. At first she had been vexed at the perpetual reproofs which her words and ways had drawn down upon her, but she had soon grown to see the enormity of saying "sunshade" instead of parasol, and "stylish," and "quite the gentleman;" and of searching for a "cosy" for the teapot, and rings for the dinner-napkins, and of laughing into her pocket-handkerchief, and offering her chair to each succeeding visitor, as if it were the only one in the room. Such were her powers of adaptation, that these things were now nearly as shocking to her suscep-

tibilities as to those of the older lady, and she could talk society talk quite readily, and practised her powers with Lady Loder as they sat together in the mornings, valuing their friends according to the amount contributed by them to the income tax, commenting on the prettiness of their parties, and the extreme "niceness" of all the young men they met at them, who happened to possess five thousand a year and upwards.

But with others of her friends, especially those she met in Lower Belgrave Street, she was less at home. They asked her questions she had never thought about, and alluded to things she had never heard mentioned; and she felt she must look foolish in their eyes. She had asked Maude what Mr. Carew had meant by talking about melting the Alps with vinegar; and Maude had explained, with

inward astonishment at such ignorance, for Maude was quite as unversed as Christine in anything beyond the sphere in which she had been brought up, and was always making mistakes fully as bad as Christine's, in consequence.

"How did you learn that sort of thing?" Christine had inquired.

And Maude had replied, "I used to learn it with Aunt Ellen."

"Did you find it very difficult?"

"Oh dear, no; not at all."

"I wish I could learn all about everything, too."

Since then Maude had lent her cousin some books; but "all about everything" is not learnt in a day, and Christine's rather languid efforts had not as yet made any vast conquests in the realms of her ignorance. To-day she was secretly carrying on some geographical studies. On hearing

that Mr. Fairbank was to be her neighbour at dinner, and that he had written a book on Brazil, a panic had seized her that he would talk about that country, and that she would be found to know nothing about it. She had a vague idea it was somewhere in India, but that would not go far; so she purloined the "B" volume of the Penny Cyclopædia, and set to work to enlighten herself further on this distant land. She was truly thankful she had done so, when she discovered that Brazil was not in any part of India, but in South America; she could not help feeling a little grudge against her mother for letting her grow up ignorant of these most elementary things. Pursuing her researches, she learnt the length of the Amazon, the months of the rainy season, and the interesting fact that the country possessed thirty species of bees, all or nearly all

devoid of stings. She had got so far when Maude called her to tea, and after carefully readjusting her dress before the glass—a duty which Christine never by any chance forgot—she went down, conscious, like Titus, that she had accomplished something that day.

At a quarter to eight the three ladies were in the drawing-room, awaiting the arrival of their friends. Maude was in black, with pearls in her auburn hair. Christine wore a very pale pink gauze, which just matched the bloom on her cheek, and looked enchanting. Lady Loder's maid had been in to put the finishing touches to her toilette, and then she had enjoyed ten minutes of perfect happiness, admiring the reflection of herself, and her new dress, standing in different attitudes to see which suited her most, and assuming various expressions in order to decide

whether she looked best smiling or grave, full-face or *en profile*. Even now she could not refrain from taking a last peep at herself in the glass over the mantelpiece as she stood warming herself by the fire.

"Don't look at yourself in the glass, Christine," said Lady Loder; "you may be quite sure there is nothing amiss when Sophie has seen to you, and girls should always seem as if they never thought of their appearance."

"Always seem!"—the perpetual motto of Lady Loder's directions. "Always be" was never in her mouth, but for ever and ever "Always seem." Christine coloured at being found out, and looked unusually beautiful as "Sir Francis and Lady Wingfield" were announced.

That night the company were merciful. There was no absentee couple who rushed

in half an hour late, having had to go a long way round because the street was being repaved with wood; no young man was "on guard," and had misdirected his note of excuse. They all came within ten minutes of each other, and were soon settled in their places in the dining-room, the men as well as the ladies in a good humour; for, though in a woman's house, the claret and champagne were known to be no less good than the soup and the cutlets.

Maude's neighbours were Captain Hotham and Mr. Simmonds; Christine sat between Mr. Fairbank and Mr. Carew, who she saw at a glance resembled his brother, only that he was darker and less quick-looking. The depression which accompanies the soup was on the whole party yet, and Christine wondered if no one was going to speak at all; but to an experienced

eye the prospect was good, and before the fish was over every tongue was unchained.

Mr. Pender began to explain to Lady Wingfield that the behaviour of the Government on the Eastern question was atrocious, and that if it hadn't been for the Opposition the country would have been ruined, and much more; to all of which Lady Wingfield answered mildly. She was a placid, fat woman, who had neither Turkish nor Russian bonds, who dined out six nights a week, and never excited herself on principle. Agitation of all kinds brings wrinkles! Mr. Carew was asking of Miss Fairbank the inevitable question, "Have you been long in London?"—inevitable till the middle of the season, when it changes to "How much longer are you going to stay in London?" Lady Eltonreigh was examining Lord Glamorgan on his opinion of Wagner's Operas, and he was trying to

conceal the fact that he had not been able to keep his eyes open after the first act, and had forgotten the criticisms which a musical friend who went with him had made afterwards. Sir Francis Wingfield was telling Effie anecdotes of his Eton days, the object of which was to show that he had been the laziest, stupidest, naughtiest, and most irreclaimable boy in the school. Mr. Fairbank had as yet said nothing to Christine about the Brazils; he had only ascertained that in her opinion to-day had been very cold, and that the spring was very backward, and that early springs were pleasanter than late ones, though, perhaps, they were not as good for the wall fruit: small beginnings truly, but who will venture to find fault with them?

Miss Fairbank was describing the somewhat uninteresting scenery of Huntingdonshire to Mr. Simmonds, who did not

look as absorbed as he ought in the account of the special points, which, in Miss Fairbank's opinion, redeemed the flatness of the country; but, then, Miss Fairbank was thirty-five, with thin colourless hair and pale prominent eyes, and that naturally would affect any young man's interest in the features of a landscape. Besides, Eustace was thinking over his afternoon's talk with Hubert Martin, and waiting for an opportunity of beginning an acquaintance with Maude. So far fortune had been favourable in putting her by his side, and though at first he wondered "if there was anything up between her and that fellow Hotham," a moment's attention to what was passing between them, showed him that there was no cause for any present apprehension.

"Did I pass you yesterday in Stanhope Street, Miss Loder?"

"No; I wasn't there at any time of the day. You must have mistaken some one else for me."

"Odd. I was going to the Park."

"Were there many people there?"

"No; it was too showery."

"I went to the Zoological Gardens. I had never seen the lions and tigers. What an awful noise they make when they roar!"

"I like the ostriches best: you can feed them with nails."

"With nails?"

"Yes. When one died, they found enough inside him to stock a small shop. He overdid it altogether, but a few act as a tonic."

"Not really?"

"Yes, really; and some day I mean to go and see the snakes fed."

"What do they eat?"

"Live rabbits and frogs mostly."

"You don't mean to say you want to see that?"

"To be sure. And the band at the Zoo plays well; shall go and hear the tunes from the 'Pirates of Penzance' when they come out. Awfully nice tunes those."

"Have you ever acted, Miss Loder?" inquired Mr. Simmonds, during a pause in the description of the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell.

"No, never; I should like to try so much. Have you?"

"Yes; I was Miss Lydia Languish in 'The Rivals Re-written.' You can't imagine what a pretty girl I was in powder and patches."

"You must have been a very tall one."

"Yes, especially as I had an inch and a half of heels; but, then, we were 're-written,' remember. I can't say, however,

that we were altogether successful; there were no footlights, and the lamps hung from the ceiling made such odd shadows on our lips; then the only available copy of the play was in Mrs. Malaprop's pocket; and when Captain Absolute came in, he forgot the beginning of his speech, and, as the prompter couldn't prompt, had to retire in confusion; and some one upset the rouge all over Sir Anthony's wig, so he had a rosy side to his head, which he had to try and keep turned away from the audience."

Here loud voices interrupted them. "I'd do as Gladstone recommended about the Turks—turn them out, bag and baggage, with their vestments and incense and mummeries. I'm sure you agree with me, Lady Wingfield; they ought to be got rid of somehow."

"Now I ought to be able to score," thought Eustace.—"What an irate old

gentleman that is!" said he, laughing. "I declare he is off on his second hobby, the ritualists;" and he waited in hopes of getting his cue.

"Poor people!" said Maude, falling straightway into the trap; "I can't bear to hear them abused like that. Even those who don't share their views ought to be able to appreciate their self-sacrificing, hardworking lives."

"Just so," replied her neighbour; "it is impossible to have a hard-and-fast rule for every one. There are plenty of minor matters in which the other parties in the Church break the law, and it is very hard that all the outcry should be against one set, and that the most useful and devoted of all." Eustace was quite surprised and pleased with himself for this speech; he had heard an old High Church relation say something of the sort, so it was sure

to be right. And so it proved; he had made an impression by this remark.

Nothing struck Maude more in her new life than the views which from time to time she heard expressed on religious subjects. The speakers always seemed intent on eradicating the errors inculcated by the different Church parties; and, in their zeal for their self-imposed mission, quite forgot to lay any plans for spreading and impressing the truths which were to supersede them. Each one desired keenly to tie all the rest of the world down to the exact forms that suited his own views; not one seemed to have an earnest longing that Christianity should be so variously presented as to attract the greatest possible number of different minds, nor did any one seem to say—

"Meantime, in the still-recurring fear
Lest I myself at unawares be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
With none of my own made—I choose here."

It was quite a relief to find some one who seemed more comprehending. "If Mr. Pender could have his way," she said, "he would bring us to the same end as the school-teacher, who dismissed each pupil for the smallest breach of discipline, and finished the day with one scholar, and he was half-witted."

But before Eustace could reply, Mr. Pender's voice was again heard. "And then their Noah's Ark coats, and their dog-collars! My belief is they know how people hate them, and wear a badge, so as to prevent hearing unpleasant truths against themselves."

Simmonds laughed. "Now, really, that is ingenious," he said, "and not a bad idea either. If each profession had a uniform, I shouldn't have asked a man, whom I afterwards found out was a distinguished Q.C., 'Why a barrister's career reminded

you of the degrees of comparison?' and when he had duly given up, told him that it was 'because they went to the bar to get on, remained there to get honour, and left it to get honest.'"

"Did you? Well, that was an unfortunate remark. How miserable one feels when one has said something of the kind!"

"One grows callous by degrees. I used to suffer agonies in private at the recollection of the men I had congratulated on engagements that were just broken off, and the ladies from whom I had anxiously inquired after the health of their defunct husbands; but now I remember them with stony-hearted composure. After all, it is only our artificial civilization that makes us mind such things; among the poor people no one cares."

"No, indeed," said Maude; "their

speeches have often surprised me. Our bailiff's wife had been frightfully ill last spring, and when I asked her if she was better, her husband answered for her, and remarked quietly, 'Oh, she's doing nicely; it's a mercy she's been spared; I don't know whatever we should have done at this time of year, with all the young chickens about.' And she didn't look a bit put out, but cheerfully responded, 'Indeed, I dunna know either, Brown; for Bessie is nothing of a hand with them, when they are down with the pip.'"

"Well," observed Mr. Simmonds, "it is just the same thing when the newspaper says, 'The Premier has risen from a bed of sickness to seize with his master-hand the helm of State. Our country would indeed have been a tempest-tossed, dismantled hulk, had not Providence seen fit to prolong his days.'"

"Yes," said Maude; "it's only a difference in the way of putting it."

Here her other neighbour intervened. "I'm afraid I have dropped a crumb on your dress, Miss Loder; will it hurt it?"

"No, not at all," Maude answered, with a feeling of irritation at being interrupted by so foolish a question. She would so much rather have gone on talking to Mr. Simmonds; there was something very taking in him, she thought; he looked clever, and had an attractive manner, and seemed perfectly wide-awake, and not at all worn out like Captain Hotham.

She tried to resume the thread of the former conversation; but Mr. Simmonds had turned to Miss Fairbank, and she could hear him saying something about "the custom in China."

"Are you going away at Easter?" asked the captain.

And Maude answered shortly, "No."

"Don't you like the country at Easter?"

"Not much; it is still too cold for pleasure."

"Isn't Lady Loder going away?"

"No."

"Doesn't she like a change?"

"I suppose not."

"And Miss Ransome, does she stay in London?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't she care to go away?"

Maude was exasperated. "Not in the least. And you, Captain Hotham, are you going out of town?"

"I hardly think so."

"No, really!" in a tone of the greatest surprise. "Are you not fond of the country in the spring?"

But here it dawned upon the worthy Guardsman that he was being chaffed; so,

having no repartee ready with which to crush his tormentor, he held his peace; and Maude, penitent for having lost her temper, had, by smiles and gracious demeanour till they went upstairs, to try and make amends.

Of course the evening was over then. The languid talk among the ladies over their coffee, and the ten minutes which pass between the coming up of the men, and the general dispersion, do not count for much; and soon Lady Loder's guests had departed, some to the House, others to parties, and the young men to their clubs, till the midnight chime should strike, and they might permit themselves to go to their balls, and make a selection from among the fair damsels who always stand about in knots up to that mystic hour.

As Mr. Simmonds was taking leave of Maude, he said in a low voice, "What

time in the afternoon are you usually in? Late? May I call? I am not much of a ball-goer, and I don't like to think of not seeing you again."

And Maude replied, with sincere pleasure in her voice, "Oh yes, do come; we are generally in about five."

"I think we will give up Mrs. Talmash's party," said Lady Loder, when he had left; "I'm rather tired, and you don't care about going, do you?"

"Oh no! not at all, thank you," exclaimed both girls, who liked dancing, but considered parties very dull things.

"Well, I think the dinner went off well?"

"Oh yes," said Christine.

"I thought it delightful," said Maude.

"I heard two pieces of news," remarked Lady Loder. "The poor Wilmots have lost everything. Their country place is to be sold, and their London house too!"

"Poor things!" said Maude; "I am very sorry for them."

"And what else did you hear?" asked Christine.

"That pretty Mrs. Streeter has run away with Arthur Rendall. It is very shocking. And what an odd thing to happen; for old Mr. Streeter has at least ten thousand a year, and Arthur Rendall not a penny!"

"Most extraordinary!" ejaculated Christine.

"How did you like Mr. Fairbank, Christine?"

"He was very pleasant; but I think Mr. Carew talked to me more."

Christine had been rather vexed at not having had a chance of exhibiting her intimate acquaintance with the history of Brazil. She had dexterously turned the conversation to Mr. Fairbank's Travels

in South America and he had told her a good many amusing stories about his adventures there. But when she had said, "By-the-by, is it not in Brazil that there are thirty kinds of bees, and all without stings?" he had replied, "I'm sure I don't know; very likely," and had asked her if she had seen the new glass hives—a subject she could really have talked of without toiling through that tiresome article.

When they went upstairs Maude did not go to bed, but sat in her armchair and thought over many things.

The life she had been leading of late did not satisfy her nature. She enjoyed her balls immensely, and quite appreciated the attention and admiration which fell to her share; but she had been brought up to feel that

"Life is real, life is earnest;"

and the unreality and want of earnestness

in her daily pursuits weighed heavily on her at times. Amusement was no longer a change and recreation after more important things; it was the beginning, middle, and end of every thought, and aim in her cousin's house. Ought such a mode of life to be quietly acquiesced in? This was a question never long absent from her thoughts.

Whilst her aunt Ellen had lived, Maude had so loved and trusted her, that she had seldom paused to weigh for herself the reasons for and against any course of action recommended to her; she had simply followed it with the complete submission of unquestioning affection. Had old Miss Loder lived, her niece might have grown so accustomed to lean on her for support, that she would never have developed a separate individuality; but death had robbed Maude of this prop, and had forced

her to judge for herself. Lady Loder's maxims and standards were entirely at variance with her own, and though her gentle nature and long habit of submission had as yet kept her back from making any decided opposition to them, and there was no perceptible alteration in her external demeanour, a change was going on within, which would in time show itself in outward resistance. It would be well for both guardian and ward if something should occur to shorten the term of Lady Loder's tutelage.

To-night, however, the girl felt unusually light-hearted, and as if the world were not so unsatisfactory after all. She did not analyze her contentment; but as she sat in her armchair, gazing into the empty grate, a dark face, which she had a few hours ago seen for the first time, kept rising before her; and as she passed her

other friends in review, and compared them with the possessor of that face, she found them sadly wanting. He was so quick and clever, so understanding and tolerant, so pleasant-looking, so capable, and up to everything. Why, in the course of the evening he had mentioned that he was an actor, and a cricketer, and a shot—no doubt a good shot; and then evidently he was a great reader, and—— Oh, Maude, Maude! What next? With what false colours are you painting this man, who is neither good, nor clever, nor cultivated, nor possessed of any of the great qualities with which you are investing him! And yet, if we condemn Maude as silly and unreasonable, must we not include the greater number of women in our censure? What is it that makes a girl single out some man from the other men whom she knows, and feel as if he were on a

pinnacle apart from the rest? Surely, in nine cases out of ten it is merely some trifle which, regarded in its own cold right, would be quite insufficient to furnish him forth as a hero, but which glows and glistens in the hues of her own imagination till he is clothed in a glory not his own. Add to this a manifest wish on the hero's part to please her, and a feeling is aroused which may make or mar a life. No; Maude was neither more nor less silly than the rest of her sex if, on this particular evening, she sat an hour in her room doing nothing, and feeling very happy.

There was one person who, if he had had a magic ring to bring home the news, might have been the reverse of pleased, and that was Sir Walter Grenville. Since the day when he had paid his farewell visit to Maude, he had thought a good

deal about her. He was a great admirer of beauty, and many were the fair faces which had attracted him from time to time; but Miss Loder, he said to himself, was different to them all. To begin with, she was the prettiest woman he had ever seen—face, height, and figure; there wasn't a fault about her. And then it was so nice of her to mind so much about the loss of that old aunt; he himself hadn't seen much in her. And the place, and all the cottagers, how cut up she seemed to be about leaving them! He liked a girl who cared about things like that. He wondered what she was doing in London; there would, no doubt, be a lot of fellows to make up to her there. What if he should hear some day that she was going to be married! A pang of jealousy shot through his heart at the idea, and he looked down the column of "fashionable intelligence" in the *Globe*,

which was lying beside him, as if he expected to see the announcement of her engagement in it. What an idiotic thing it was of him never to have thought it possible to go to London before Easter! He seized a pen, and wrote to his favourite landlady in St. James's Street, and asked if he could have lodgings. Then he took Smut on his lap, and gave him a great many more biscuits than were at all good for him; and then, feeling he had done all he could, he went out to see how his improvements were getting on.

The answer from his landlady proved favourable, and he was on the eve of departure for London when a telegram was put into his hands, announcing that the agent for his Irish property had been shot, and requesting him to come over immediately. Though vexed at the delay, he of course went off by the first mail; and

was still, at the time of Lady Loder's dinner-party, inhabiting the public-house at Kirkmannon, making inquiries which resulted in nothing, and offering rewards which no one dared claim. Besides this, he had to find a successor for Mackinn; and it was not easy to hear of any one who, for a moderate remuneration, was willing to become a mark for the discontented Irishmen; so Sir Walter's affairs gave no promise of being settled at any definite time, though he worked his hardest, with the St. James's Street lodging always in view.

## CHAPTER IX.

"As I sat in the café, I said to myself,
They may talk as they please about what they call pelf,
They may sneer as they like about eating and drinking,
But help it I cannot, I cannot help thinking
How pleasant it is to have money; heigho!
How pleasant it is to have money!"

CLOUGH.

ONE morning a letter came for Christine, addressed in an unknown hand; and opening it, she read as follows:—

"41, Southbourne Terrace.

"DEAR MISS RANSOME,

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you as yet, so I must introduce

myself to you as your mother's cousin, Augusta Menteith. Perhaps you may have heard her mention my name.

"We are going to have a dance next Thursday, and hope to persuade you to join our circle on that occasion. Pray stand on no ceremony with us, and come at ten, as our little gathering is an early one. Give my compliments to Lady Loder, and say I will take every care of you, if she will allow me to be your chaperon.

"Ever yours most sincerely,

"AUGUSTA MENTEITH."

"What answer had I better send?" inquired Christine.

"Oh! don't go, certainly," returned Lady Loder. "It will be some horrid bad ball; you had much better get out of it. Who is Mrs. Menteith?"

"She is mamma's first cousin; she

married a very rich stockbroker. Mamma and she were not good friends; there was a quarrel long ago, and we have never seen her."

"Who does she give balls for?"

"Just for her own amusement, I suppose; she has no daughters. There is a step-son, I believe; but they can hardly be for him."

"Has she money of her own?'"

"I believe she had a good fortune."

"That makes a difference; I think you shall go. It will do no harm, and she might be of use to you. Only please take care not to get me into an acquaintance."

So Christine wrote and accepted; and when the day came, donned a brown ball-gown with sunflowers, and set out by herself.

There is something pleasant in a nocturnal drive in London. The shops

that are still open look bright and cheery; you can almost give them credit for the "unprecedented assortments at merely nominal prices," about which one reads in the advertisements. The crowd that treads the pavement is out for pleasure, not business. Office-boys, servants, and factory-girls are taking their constitutional. Here is a milliner's apprentice, or a hardworked dressmaker, walking arm-in-arm with the young man in a bright necktie with very large spots, on whom she means eventually to bestow her hand; there may be seen a tradesman superintending the putting up of his shutters, previous to his glass of brandy and water and his pipe, in the comfortable back parlour. Here, again, is a thrifty housewife buying to-morrow's beefsteak in front of a flaring butcher's shop; and there a landlady hurrying home with a well-filled basket, and a proud sense of

having driven a most successful bargain. Then, leaving the bustle of the streets, you pass into the quiet squares where the gas-lights look yellow and dingy in the bright moonlight, and the cats are darting in and out of the railings, fearless of their canine enemies, who, being respectable characters, turn in early. Then into another street, where the steam-roller rests with its red "danger-signal," till it is time to begin its puff-puff and grind-grind on the morrow; and so on through a variety of scenes, some active and noisy, some peaceful and silent, till you reach your destination.

Christine was well amused in looking out of the window, and was quite sorry when the carriage stopped before Mrs. Menteith's door. She alighted and went in. The hall was large, and everything seemed done on a most expensive scale. There were ferns and palm trees in the

entrance, and flowers all up the staircase, and there were little fountains of scent on each landing.

She was received by a lady of magnificent aspect. She wore a dress of scarlet satin, covered with black lace. An edifice of black plaits, red geraniums, and diamonds, surmounted her head; her fat arms were bare to the very shoulder; her skirt was very short in front, and displayed a pair of scarlet shoes with diamond buckles.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, my dear!" exclaimed this voluminous person; "I hope we shall soon be friends." And she embraced her young cousin with such fervour that an ominous crack on the right shoulder was heard, which warned her to be less effusive. Christine did not at all appreciate this offer of friendship, and still less the kiss that accompanied it. One of the great grievances of the Ran-

somes had been their non-recognition by "Augusta," and now that a member of the family was offered the distinction of her regard, with heartless ingratitude she mentally spurned it!

She looked round the room and saw that there was not one human being to whom she could put a name; in the sublime vulgarity of London language, "there was no one there," and she estimated Augusta accordingly. She was introduced to Mr. Menteith, a short roundabout little man, with pepper and salt whiskers, an ample white waistcoat, and a large neck-tie, and then to "My step-son, Peter."

Mr. Peter Menteith was short like his father; his hair and eyes were very light, and his face was studded, more than dotted, with large freckles that partook of the general disability of his constitution to produce any colour, and were of a pale-

ellow hue. There was one on the very nd of his nose. He was irreproachably ressed and gloved, and seemed fully con- cious of his charms, which, to give him is due, were highly rated among his emale friends, though men in general hought him "rather an ass."

"Shall we twirl?" he said facetiously to Christine as a valse struck up; and they valked off together to the dancing-room.

"How beautiful your flowers are!" re- marked Christine, just for something to say.

"Yes, not bad," he replied. "The governor ad them all up from Wollaston; that's our ountry place, you know. I said to him, No nurseryman's stuff, if you please, ather; everything from home.' Don't you hink I was right?"

"Well," said Christine, "they could ardly have been more lovely."

"It wasn't that; it was the expense.

'Peter,' says he, ''twill cost a hundred pounds.' 'Never mind that,' says I; 'let's have them first and ask the cost afterwards. What's the advantage of a country seat if you can't have a few palms from it?' The governor bought the estate last year. 'Peter,' says he, 'there's a couple of hundred thousand to invest; what'll you have them in?' and I said, 'Land, father, of course; there's nothing like that.' 'Two and a half per cent., Peter,' says he; 'but that's your look-out more than mine.' 'Never mind that,' says I, 'land let it be;' and land it is."

"I think you were quite right," said Christine; "a country place is a delightful possession."

"I'm glad you approve. I should like to show it to you some day, Christine. I may call you by your name, mayn't I? you see, we're cousins."

"No, really, we are not; no, please don't call me by my name," said Christine, quite dumbfounded at the strides their friendship was making; and for one moment Peter looked abashed.

"I'll never abuse the *Universe* and *Veracity* again," he observed, after a pause.

"Why not?"

"Because they furnished me with the pleasure I'm now enjoying."

"How is that?"

"I saw in the list of beauties after the drawing-room, 'Miss Christine Ransome.' Mother,' says I, 'isn't that one of your cousins?' 'Yes,' says she. 'Then, please, when you have a ball, invite her; she's come out as a crack beauty.' 'Certainly, if you wish it,' says she; so you see I've those papers to thank for your presence."

Christine was undergoing a singular experience; in her Falconbridge days she

would have been delighted with this sort of homage, and would have afterwards repeated the compliments paid her, with much gusto, to her mother and Beatrix. As to repeating them in Hertford Street, the idea made her positively shudder; indeed, she would have liked to annihilate Peter for venturing to speak to her in such a tone. She had altered a good deal in the last month, not only in externals, but in real refinement, and this slice, cut out as it were from a former existence, was very strange to her. And home would be like this, with poverty and pettiness and squabblings superadded! She shrunk from the thought; never could she go home and be poor again. She must manage to escape that somehow.

When the dance was over, she was introduced to a string of other partners, some of whom were pleasant, clever men, and all

f whom had the advantage of looking as f they came to dance and amuse themelves, and not to loll in doorways and pity he folly of the rest. Mrs. Menteith was n excellent hostess, making every one velcome, and introducing partners to all he girls who were standing still.

What a curious difference in this respect here is between the system of ball-giving s carried on in smart London houses, and n less distinguished society! Be advised, Miss Clara Potter, of Cedar Cottage; if ou are in London the week of the Duchess f Swansea's ball, never mind the fact that ou live just outside her Park gates in Wales, and make no effort to get a card. Accept instead the concert tickets, or opera ox, with which she will gladly acknowedge her sense of your presence in the metropolis. If you go to the ball, you will tand wearily in the corner till nature

gives in, and you and your mamma go downstairs to the hired brougham, and so home to bed. Your friend the duchess will not make you acquainted with a single partner, and it will not be her fault; probably, if she tried to do so, the young man would reply that he was already engaged for the whole evening, or that he never danced. But if you have ball-giving friends in a humbler sphere who invite you, go, for they will receive you cordially, and you will soon find plenty of friends among them. The reason of the difference must be this. Society is shaped like a pyramid; near the apex the members are few, and therefore naturally know each other. If outsiders intrude upon this privileged coterie, they must be made to feel that they are unnaturalized subjects.

Besides, anybody from without this magic circle is "nobody" within it, and

therefore it would be almost rude in a hostess to seem to perceive that one of her guests does not already belong to it, as she would do if she attempted an introduction. A little lower down in the pyramid the area is broader, and it is therefore impossible that every one should know every one else; so it is not necessary to assume that: "not to know me, argues yourself unknown;" and the interloper may be kindly welcomed without further ado.

Before many more dances were over, Mr. Peter Menteith was again at Christine's side. "I say, will you come down to supper? Do!" And Christine went.

"What'll you take?—a cutlet and some fiz?" he inquired, when they were seated at one of the little round tables with which the handsome dining-room was filled. "Now, tell me; what sort of an old

woman is it that you live with? What would she say if I called? Would she cut up rough, or like it?"

"Oh no! you had better not call; Lady Loder is very particular. I mean—— You see, I'm not exactly at home there; I am hardly even a relation of hers."

"Well, then, Miss Ransome, you mustn't cut us after this ball; you must come and see us. You will, won't you?"

"Yes, I will, if Mrs. Menteith asks me."

"Oh, I'll see to that."

"Who is the pretty girl in pink?" Christine inquired, to change the subject.

"That's Miss Esmé Beech. She's considered a beauty, and she has thirty thousand pounds. Her mother used to make rather a set at me; but I wouldn't have it at all, and showed it. No, no; none of that for me. 'Love is free,' isn't it, Miss Ransome?"

"She is very pretty," remarked Christime, rather irrelevantly.

"Pretty? No, I don't think so. Not but that I did once. I won't say that I was not rather smit in that quarter at one time, till I found out what the mother was about."

"Shall we go upstairs? I hear the music beginning, and I am engaged."

So they retraced their steps.

"There's to be a cotillon," said Mr. Langley, the junior partner of the Menteith firm. "Will you dance it with me?"

"With pleasure," she replied.

But before it began, the indefatigable Peter bustled up. "Will you give me the cotillon, Miss Ransome?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm engaged."

"What a nuisance! But you'll change? I ask it as a favour."

"I really can't."

"Not to please me?"

"Not to please anybody." And Peter went off in a huff.

However, when a figure came in which the gentlemen took little presents to the ladies, Peter advanced towards Christine with a long narrow box, done up in silver paper, in his hand, and during the turn of the valse which succeeded, whispered, "It's the wedding present mother bought for Miss Lowther. She can easily get another. Let me have the pleasure of giving this to you."

Christine did not dare open it then, but she accepted it with delight. Of course it would have been different if it had been presented on an ordinary occasion, but, as a cotillon toy, she need have no scruple in taking it; and she had so few pretty things that it was additionally delightful to receive this one.

The pleasures of wealth flashed into her mind with redoubled force. It was evident that the son of the house was struck with her; she could not, of course, guess how far, but perhaps, if she encouraged him, it might come to something. And if so, should she be glad? She looked at the damask walls, and thought "Yes;" she glanced across at Peter, and thought "No;" and then she remembered that she must not bore her partner by these silent reflections on her destiny, and made herself so charming to Mr. Langley that he was quite fascinated by her. When it was over, Mrs. Menteith came to insist on her having some more supper; and Peter found her carriage, and she started homewards, amid pressing invitations to come again soon.

And now for the first time she ventured to investigate the contents of her jeweller's

case. She opened it, and saw a sight that made her heart beat with pleasure: it was a handsome broad gold bracelet, ornamented with pearls! Think of a life where such things could be had for the asking! Think!

It was very late when she crept softly into the house. The flame of her candle flattened itself as she mounted each successive step on the stairs; and every time the artificial light paled, the houses, towers, and spires, which she could see through the passage window, flashed out clear and distinct in the cold blue dawn.

She stationed herself at her bedroom window, and looked down into the quiet street below. She was tired with dancing, and her head throbbed with the thoughts that surged through it. "Should I be happy if I could marry him? Should I? —should I?—should I? He will be very

ich; but how he talks of money! Home so poor, and dull, and vulgar; but is much better to be rich and vulgar? Would it be possible to endure him? But, fter all, plenty of people get on well nough without caring much for one nother. Could I? I don't know."

By degrees the quiet calmed her. There something awing in looking down upon ne great city that lies asleep below—sleep, all but the sick, the suffering, the orrowful, the dying; there is no escape om the solemnity of the impression. Ier pulses ceased to beat with that dis-acting force; the excitement born of the urmoil and noise she had so recently uitted, began to pass away; soon an resistible sleepiness overpowered all other ensations, and she went to bed, with a trange, unconscious sense of the realiza-on of the day-dream she had dreamt the ight of her arrival.

Next morning she awoke with a weight on her mind. "How much should she tell Lady Loder about last evening's events? and, above all, what should she say about the bracelet?" At first she thought she would not mention it; but then she could certainly never venture to wear it, for Lady Loder would be sure to notice it. She put it in her pocket before going downstairs, and determined to be guided by circumstances.

Lady Loder was sitting alone at the table. Maude had finished her breakfast, and had gone upstairs.

"Well! good morning," said her cousin, as she entered. "How did you amuse yourself last night?"

"Very much indeed, thank you. I'm afraid I stayed dreadfully late."

"Oh, never mind that, if you were happy." Lady Loder was a good-natured

rson, and always ready to promote
nusement of all sorts. "There was no
e there, I suppose?"

"They were all strangers to me; but
rs. Menteith soon introduced me to
enty of people."

"Is it a good house?"

"Yes, beautiful! Full of pictures and
ina, and all hung with silk."

"Ah! rich people, then?"

"Yes; evidently very rich."

"And what is Mrs. Menteith like?"

"She is a large, tall woman, very
orgeously dressed; but not quite —
uite——"

"Ah! yes; I understand. And the
n?"

"He is not good-looking; he talks a
reat deal. I should think he is about
ve and twenty," said Christine, rather
uiltily. "There was a cotillon," she

continued, growing more and more red and shy and jerky, "and he gave me that;" and she pushed the box across the table.

Lady Loder looked first at the bracelet, and then at Christine's blushing face. "Very pretty indeed. Were all the presents on that scale? If so, Mr. Menteith must be a rich man indeed!"

"No, not exactly. I didn't see them close. No, I am sure they were not," stammered Christine, recollecting the sixpenny strawberry emery-cushion that her neighbour had received.

"Then you seem to have been marked out for his particular regard? Is he very dreadful, Christine?"

"No, I don't think so," said Christine, with inborn prudence.

Nothing is more rash in a girl than to express adverse opinions on a young man

o is trying to make himself agreeable. wever sieve-like the memories of her nds may ordinarily be, they will be e to have retained every word of her judged criticism, and should she after- rds wish to relent towards her admirer, ll not fail to quote it on all occasions, a manner most perverse and irritating. ough Christine's experience was small, instinct came to her aid, and so she d, "No, I don't think so."

"Well, then," resumed Lady Loder, "I ould recommend you to cultivate the quaintance. You see, it is very desirable at you should make a good marriage, ur father being a poor man, who cannot ve you any fortune; and though you e very pretty, you haven't many oppor- nities at home. Of course, in Maude's se, I should advise differently; but as ur circumstances are not the same as

hers, I think you should consider the matter if you have the chance. I should not mind receiving the young man here, if it could be arranged without making an acquaintance with his mother."

Christine winced a little, but she was by now tolerably used to Lady Loder's blunt speeches.

"Oh no! I would rather he did not come here," she exclaimed, thinking of his yellow face, and loud voice, and self-assertive manner, and how antipathetic his every word would be to Lady Loder.

"Well, perhaps he had better not; but you can go now and then to his mother's, and probably you will see him in that way."

Later in the morning Christine gave an account of her ball to Maude, and began paving the way to consulting her on the question which, since last night, she

ad so frequently turned over in her ind.

"Should you think, from my description, hat Peter Menteith was a very unpleasant ort of person?" she asked.

And Maude heartily responded, "Very npleasant, indeed, I should say, quite orrid."

"I wonder if any girl who married him ould be happy, or if she would repent it fter a bit?"

"I should not think any one would arry him," said Maude, with youthful ntolerance.

"Dear Maude! I am sure he will have t least twelve thousand a year."

"That ought not to make any difference. cannot understand a girl marrying any ne with twelve thousand a year, whom he would not marry with two."

"But it happens every day, Maude,"

said Christine; and then she added, with a little sigh, "All people have not happy homes like you."

"At any rate they can go out as governesses; that would be far better than marrying a man without caring for him, simply for his money."

Christine, seeing from this ebullition that she would find little sympathy in that quarter, was silent. It must be confessed that Maude had been rather hard on her, but the subject of worldly marriages was one which she could not contemplate with any patience; like most very young people, she failed to see the extenuating circumstances which might excuse those who held views less sublimely high than her own, and where she felt sure of being right, she had not learnt to clothe her opinion in less incisive language. Time would teach her to be more lenient in her judgments and her expressions.

## CHAPTER X.

"Die Red' ist uns gegeben
Damit wir nicht allein
Für uns nur sollen leben,
Und fern von Leuten sein.
Wir sollen uns befragen,
Und sehn auf guten Rath,
Das Leid einander klagen
So uns betreten hat."

SIMON DACH.

SINCE Maude's adventure at Mr. Webster's she had made no more philanthropic efforts; but now all of a sudden her energies revived, and she resolved to carry out her plan of visiting in a hospital. She invited Christine to accompany her; but that young lady replied, with her sweetest smile, "Oh no, dear Maude. I am not

clever like you; I am afraid I should be of no use at all."

She was one of those people who know how convenient it is to express the lowest opinion of their own capabilities in every possible direction. The practice is "'twice blessed;" it sounds modest, and it has the further merit of preventing anything from being expected of them. This habit ministered greatly both to her popularity and to her ease.

"Good-bye, then. I shall have to go alone," said Maude, cheerfully; and she ran off. She soon reached the hospital, and interviewed several of the authorities, who were all very kind, and readily consented to let her pay a weekly visit in one of the wards. Having finished her arrangements, she set out homewards, meaning to keep inside the railing of Green Park till she could cross Piccadilly, and get back by one

of the quiet streets. It did occur to her that perhaps Piccadilly could hardly be included in the "quieter parts of Mayfair," in which alone she was privileged to walk unattended, but in so good a cause the line must not be drawn too closely; Lady Loder was not strict on such points, and would not object when Maude should disclose where she had been.

She had just entered Green Park, when a tall, well-dressed man advanced cordially towards her and shook hands. Who was he? Maude could not recollect his face.

"Have you forgotten me?" he said, seeing her hesitation. "I had the happiness of dancing with you last week."

Maude looked again, but without recalling his features. However, she had been to at least half a dozen balls the preceding week, and had made so many fresh acquaintances that she might well have for-

gotten one. She therefore smiled graciously and said, "How do you do? I am afraid I did not remember you when you spoke." At which her new friend was forgiving enough to turn round and walk with her.

"What a delightful ball it was!" he observed.

"Very," she replied, still quite in the dark, and wondering extremely that any one should be so ignorant of London customs as to join her when alone.

"Do you often walk out in the mornings?"

"Yes, nearly every day. Please don't let me take you out of your way; I am going to cross Piccadilly here."

"Do you think I would allow you to cross the street by yourself? Allow me;" and he offered her his arm.

Maude did not know what to do; she could persistently refuse to see the proffered

arm, but she could not prevent his walking with her to the other side of the street. Here she looked at him again; there was something peculiar in his air. "I don't know you at all," she suddenly said; "you had better go away."

"Indeed, you are in error," he returned; "hear what I have to say." But without replying she quickened her pace.

"Ah! that one so fair should be so cruel," he ejaculated, and hastened his steps so that he was still beside her.

But Maude had perceived a few yards ahead the well-known red parasol of Lady Loder, who was slowly pacing along the pavement. With a little run she reached her. "Cousin Mary," she cried, "do send away this man, who will walk with me."

Lady Loder at once realized the position; she drew the trembling girl's hand within her arm, and said to the man. "You had

better take yourself off at once, or I shall call the policeman;" at which Maude's late companion politely lifted his hat, and turning down a side street disappeared.

Maude was not very far from tears, but Lady Loder seemed more inclined to laugh. "I told you you were much too pretty to go about alone, Maude; but girls are so wilful that they always think they know best. However, don't make yourself unhappy; only do for the future content yourself with leading the life of a lady, and being a little less energetic."

And Maude, resigning herself to the inevitable, did as countless other girls before her have done; she sat down and crossed her hands before her, and gave herself up to the round of party-going that seemed to have become her lot in life. They went to teas, concerts, balls, and drums; they walked on Sunday in the

ark; they ordered dresses, they left cards; nd though Maude had an undefined con- ciousness that there were duties beyond hich she was neglecting, she could not nswer the questions "What duties? and ow can I fulfil them?" so that, outwardly t least, her days were idled away nearly as ompletely as Christine's.

At length Holy Week and Easter came, ringing a lull in the gaieties of the Hert- ord Street party, and they had time to see nore of Mrs. Carew. One day Lady Loder nnounced that she had caught a cold, and nat talking made her cough; so she should end the girls to dine in Lower Belgrave treet, and should spend the evening doing er accounts.

"I'm sorry we did not know in time to nake a party for you," said Effie, as they rrived. "Edward is here, but there will e no one besides our three selves and you."

"Indeed, we didn't expect a party," said Christine.

"Nor want one," added Maude.

Edward Carew had met Christine repeatedly since he first made her acquaintance, and each time he had grown to like her better. With a mind intelligent enough to understand what her companion was talking about, but not sufficiently awake or educated to notice that the different views of different people were contradictory, and could not be held together, she always agreed, and agreed perfectly honestly with the person who was conversing with her at the moment; and her want of participation in most subjects beyond her own narrow range, was concealed behind the pretty sympathetic manner which came from her intense wish to please. She seemed absorbed in the speaker's every word; she was convinced

y his every argument; she was enlightened
y his every explanation: a silent tribute
hich from so lovely a girl a man must
ave been more than human to resist.

And so it befell that the best days of the
eek to Edward Carew were those on
hich he had the chance of meeting Miss
ansome. They had chatted and talked
bout many things, and one evening, when
ey were sitting apart, he had confided
o her all his plans for working his new
arish—a subject which he had much at
eart, though he did not often speak of
; and she had listened with such rapt
ttention, and had made such pertinent
emarks (they were generally echoes of
omething he had just said, but this he
id not notice), that he had become more
han ever convinced of what an excellent
lergyman's wife she would make. He
as a man of strong feeling, but very

reserved in showing it; and though, from his manner with Christine, many a girl would have known that he was not indifferent to her, she, being used to the more clearly expressed admiration of Mr. Albert Parker and Mr. Peter Menteith, had no idea that he thought of her at all.

"What have you been doing this afternoon, Effie?" inquired Maude. "Did you go and see the pictures at Christie's?"

"No; just as I was starting, two old ladies came in, and kept me at home."

"Who were they?" inquired Mr. Carew.

"Miss Tucker and Miss Cornelia Tucker, of the Knoll; parishioners of yours, Edward. They came in rather shyly, saying they understood the Reverend Edward Carew was staying here, and they wanted to speak to him about the village book-club. You were out, so they said they

vould write, and then they sat down and aid me a visit."

"Did you like my new parishioners?" nquired her brother-in-law.

"Yes, very much. They were dear old hings; such as could only grow in the ountry, or a very small county town. They were both dressed alike, down to ying their bonnets under their left ear; nd when one said anything, the other epeated it with admiring emphasis."

"It's a shame to laugh at them, Effie," aid Maurice Carew.

"I'm not laughing at them. Honestly, admire those sort of people immensely; hey are the salt of the earth, and ever so nuch better than many who think themelves above them. They look at the ssentials of things, and not half so much s we do at externals. If you say 'Soand-so has grown up a pretty girl,' you

feel quite small when they reply, 'She is a nice good girl;' and you recognize how much higher their standpoint is."

"Yes," said Edward, "there were several ladies of that sort at Broxton, who were of immense use in the place."

"The only thing about them that is a little oppressive," resumed Mrs. Carew, "is that they are so conventional. There is nothing spontaneous about them; you never know whether their gentle trickle of conversation, in which they always say the nice, right, kind thing, is out of the abundance of their hearts, or out of the abundance of the good little books that they read."

"You really might give them the benefit of the doubt," said Maurice.

"And then they are so terribly deficient in humour, that they always confound laughing at the comical surroundings of

good thing, with laughing at the good
ing itself. If, just as an example of
ourgeon's style of illustration, you tell
em that he quotes an old man who said,
Reading the Bible is like eating fish;
ecause, just as you have to put out the
ones, so you should set aside the biblical
fficulties and profit by the rest,' they
ink you are laughing at the Bible, and
e shocked accordingly."

"I hope you didn't entertain them with
at anecdote?" said Maurice.

"No; I behaved with all the decorum
hich could be required from Edward's
ster-in-law. I did not even show a sign
hen Miss Tucker informed me she had
eard a sermon on Sunday—I couldn't
ake out where—which said that the
orld was not created in six days of
wenty-four hours, and when Miss Cor-
elia echoed the remark, adding that the

'minister must have been a downright infidel.'"

"But ladies not only of Miss Tucker's class have a way of throwing the words infidel and atheist very freely," said Edward; "they apply them to every one who doubts of anything, from the immortality of the soul to the human voice of Balaam's ass."

"So they do very often," said Effie.

"I sometimes wonder, to go to rather a different subject," remarked Edward, "whether the way children, and especially girls, are brought up with regard to scepticism is the best that could be devised. I was immensely struck the other day by a talk I had with my sister Minnie. She is sixteen, I think, and has lived all her life in the country, with but few books, and those carefully chosen by my mother. She looks upon sceptics as a small minority

of wicked, conceited people, suffering from what she calls 'the pride of intellect,' and, from voluntary pervertedness, rejecting a religion, every part of which can be proved with the certainty of two and two make four."

"I should say hers was a very happy state of mind," said Maurice.

"I am not sure," resumed his brother. "It might be if she could live all her life under her mother's roof, in the schoolroom —though even then I doubt it; but suppose some day she should meet a man who is decidedly sceptical, and discovers that he has given up all, or part of his faith, after much heart-searching and sorrow; that, instead of being wicked, he is a man of much higher aims than the common run of her friends; and that he is well able to give a reason for the doubt that is within him. What then?"

"She could always refuse to discuss the question with him," said Maude.

"Ten to one she would not; and if she did, there would remain a lurking feeling that opinions, which could only be persisted in by declining to hear the other side, must be very weak."

"Not the opinions, surely," replied Maude; "only the person who holds them."

"Depend upon it, few of us are humble enough to take that view."

"There is so much to be said on both sides," said Effie, "that one gets quite puzzled. But tell us, Edward, how you would manage."

"We have an unbeliever at Falconbridge," remarked Christine, feeling it incumbent on her to say something, "and he is a shocking man. His name is Mr. Keeps, the auctioneer; he drinks and beats his wife."

"I dare say," said Edward, looking at the fair speaker with more admiration than perhaps her observation warranted; "but, after all, there are believers who drink and beat their wives. You may trust what I say: sceptics are by no means always the greatest sinners."

"But give us an outline of your educational plan, Edward," said his brother.

"I don't feel that I have one cut and dried," replied he. "I am sure thus far. I should never represent unbelievers as necessarily wicked, nor disguise the longing they often have for faith, nor the love of truth which makes them refuse to accept with their lips, that which they as yet cannot accept with their hearts. Then I think I should explain their leading objections, stating them quite fairly, so as not to enlist the sense of justice on the other side. And afterwards I should thoroughly

hammer in the opposite arguments, point ing out clearly all the difficulties whic the infidel's view leaves unsolved."

"Yes, that is a very important point, said Maurice. "I am certain that man people have an impression that, though i would be fatally wicked to become a infidel, if they did all their puzzles woul disappear."

"I do not think, for example, that th theory of 'atoms somewhere up in spac fortuitously concurrent anyhow,' would b received as a very satisfactory cosmica theory, if it were deprived of the lullin and convincing force of the long words,' said Edward.

"I quite see your side of the case,' replied Effie; "but you must allow tha there is another one which must be con sidered too. Supposing, when you had awakened this spirit of inquiry in you

pupils, you saw some of them misled by the unbelieving arguments you had set before them, how should you feel?"

"I should hope, and trust, and pray," he replied, earnestly. "And, Effie, there is a bright side even to scepticism. If a man or a woman has lost all hold on Christianity, and looks at it from the outside, it often comes to be estimated as we only estimate things when they are gone. From a distance they can see what a surpassing, what an immeasurable motive power it would be, if, as they say, 'it were a fact, not a fable;' and if, as mostly happens, they, after a time, get back to it, they find that it is to them what they never felt it to be before."

"But, Mr. Carew," said Maude, "surely you first attribute all sorts of imaginable virtues to your sceptics, and then pity and sympathize with the image you have

made. Are they really all these struggling, high-minded persons which you describe?"

"I was only speaking of the best of the class. Of course there are plenty who use their phraseology, and have never thought the matter out for themselves, and plenty more whose lives and conduct predispose them to disbelieve; but the sceptical school is not the only one which has unworthy hangers-on. However, I will say anything you like against the 'in-these-days-I-suppose-that-none-but-nursery-maids-and-children-believe' sect."

"That is one of the many things I like in Browning's poetry," said Effie; "he has a firm grasp on the main truths of religion, and is neither ashamed of holding them, nor of saying that he holds them. There is in him none of the feeling, which I believe in much more than Edward does, that for intellectual society you are nothing

without doubts, and that you had therefore better make the most of those you have. He never sighs, and sobs, and pines over what is not clear to his mind; but puts it aside, and revels and glories in and holds tightly to the crowning doctrines of Christianity."

"There's something immensely strong and bracing in his poems," said Maurice. "I like to be told that life is grand, and to be used for a purpose; and that eternity is beyond, grander and nobler than life; it is refreshing, after groping about in the dark with Clough and Arnold."

"Another thing I find consoling in him," said Effie, "is his estimate of middle life and old age. You, Edward, will hardly understand what I mean, and Maude and Christine are both too young to have felt it themselves, so you must all take my word for it. There is something very

depressing to a woman when she comes to my age. Don't laugh"—for there were broad smiles on the faces of the two gentlemen. "You men go gracefully downhill from, say thirty to seventy. But we women go down in terraces with unlovely bumps, and the first bump is about my age, which, as you know, is twenty-seven."

"A most venerable age certainly," said her husband.

"It is quite true. We begin to hear every one mourning the departed or departing good looks of our contemporaries; we hear much pity expressed for poor Lady B——, whose daughter has been out nine years and has never married. In novels we find that we have become utterly uninteresting. We may, indeed, appear as a designing widow, who, by dint of rouge, pearl-powder, and arduous wiles, causes

two volumes of agony to the heroine with the lilies and roses; but we are sure to be defeated in the end. In poetry we fare no better; our only privilege now is to weep. We may bewail our lost beauty, our grey hairs, our departed admirers, our faithless lovers, or our forlorn future; but we are valueless for any other purpose. Really, at times we feel it is very kind of the public to allow us to go on living. Then in these moments we open our Browning and read—

'Grow old along with me!—The best is yet to be
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand, who saith, "A whole I planned.
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid."'

Can't you imagine how cheering that is?"

"It really is a feeling I don't think I enter into," said Edward.

"You men are so destitute of imagina-

tion," exclaimed Mrs. Carew; "you never can understand anything you have not felt yourselves. I know as well as you do that it is something quite crooked in our state of society that makes a woman feel shelved and useless during the best years of her life, and I also know that those lines do not refer to persons of twenty-seven. Still, I say they may quite be looked at in that light by any one who chooses, and I can't imagine what there is to laugh at." Effie was downright angry.

"I see exactly what you mean," said Christine, "though I don't know why you should feel it, for you don't look a day more than twenty, dear Effie. But I have always thought how sad it must be for pretty women when they begin to fade; and I'm sure any poem that consoles them, must be a great comfort."

"How charmingly frank!" thought Ed-

ward. "At any rate, *she* can never lose her looks; she will be beautiful as quite an old woman."

But Effie was not so to be mollified. "Ought not the rhododendrons to be coming out in the park?" she asked, with grim determination to change the subject; and so they talked about trivial matters till the girls left.

That evening, when Mr. and Mrs. Carew were standing together on the hearthrug—that spot which we love in summer because of its associations with winter fires—he said gently, "Effie, did you really mean what you said to-night about the weight of your twenty-seven years, or were you in joke?"

"I meant it very much; or perhaps, rather, I was describing what I felt the last year or two at my aunt's."

"It made me sad to hear you talk so. Don't you know that, whatever you are or

may be to others, you will always remain everything in all the world to me?"

"I like to hear you say that," she replied, looking up in his face; "yes, indeed, I know it quite well, and it makes me very happy. But you have seen enough of my aunt to be aware that her theories are very different to yours. Her one idea is that every girl who does not marry some one in smart society by the time she is three and twenty is a decided failure; and I wasn't meek enough to like being looked at and sighed over as a failure, because I hadn't realized an ambition which had always been her ambition, never mine. I often explained this to her in the clearest language; but she didn't understand, and it was so depressing and so aggravating, that, allowing for a little exaggeration, I really at times felt just what I described to-night."

"Say you don't feel it now."

"I don't—I don't; not the least little tiny bit," she said, with tears standing in her eyes. "I'm as happy as the day is long, and want no one to comfort me in my troubles but you. There, now, are you satisfied?" And the quiet grave man looked at her with a look that said more than words could say, and putting his arm round her, gave her a silent kiss.

## CHAPTER XI.

"There be three degrees, of this Hiding, and Vailing of a Man's Selfe.—The first Closenesse, Reservation and Secrecy; when a Man leaveth himself without Observation, or without Hold to be taken, what he is. The second Dissimulation, in the Negative; when a Man lets fall signes and arguments that he is not, that he is. And the third Simulation in the Affirmative; when a Man industriously, and expressly, faigns, and pretends to be, that he is not."—BACON.

SHORTLY after the dinner-party, Eustace Simmonds had been obliged to leave town for a few days; but on his return he took an early opportunity of calling in Hertford Street. He was pleased with the lighting up of the face, and the little blush with which the young lady of the house re-

ceived him; and as he drank his cup of tea, and listened to Lady Loder's remarks on the number of people who nowadays have given up sugar, he was calculating what was the quickest possible time in which he could bring matters to a point. "The earlier the better," he said to himself, "both because of those hateful bills, and because of stories which might crop up and wouldn't help me. Yet it doesn't do to be too quick on a girl. What a wretched place London is for making love! Three days in a country house would be worth a month here."

"Yes, certainly, Lady Loder," he continued aloud, in answer to her last observation; "but I believe Banting had more to do with it than pity for the slaves. However, of course it doesn't sound so well to say so."

Just then Lady Wingfield came in with

her son, a boy of seventeen, and the move which ensued enabled Eustace to come nearer to Maude's side.

"I was so sorry not to call sooner, but I had to go into Gloucestershire for a few days. If I hadn't been in a hurry to get back, I should have enjoyed my holiday; everything looked so beautiful and fresh. I don't know why, but I kept thinking how you would have admired the blue haze on the hills, and the tender young leaves, and the clear brook rippling over the stones between the bright red banks."

"How did you know I liked that sort of country? I never told you."

"I can't say how I know; I suppose there is a sort of person whose ideas one enters into."

"Because they are so shallow," said Maude, vexed.

"Not at all." A pause. Eustace well

knew the value of pauses in conversation. He did not seem disposed to speak, Maude wanted to hear what more he had to say on the subject, so both sat silent; she watching with apparent interest the bow on her shoe, and twisting her handkerchief round her thumb.

"Don't you believe," he went on at last, slowly and with hesitation, "that when persons interest you, you gain a sort of insight into their thoughts and natures that you haven't into those of the rest of the world? I don't pretend to be a reader of characters in general, but I think I know yours. I could tell you of tastes which you have never mentioned to me."

"Really!" said Maude, taking her eyes off her rosette. "I will put you to the test. Now begin. What am I fond of?"

"Flowers, children, country sights and sounds. Confess! Since you have been in

London, haven't you longed to hear the song of some other bird besides the forward smutty little sparrows?"

"Yes, indeed!" she exclaimed, astonished, never remembering that these were generalities like those of Professor Empson when he tells your character, for a shilling from your handwriting; "only this morning I was longing to hear the cuckoo. Go on."

"Then you are often vexed at the frivolity and worldliness of London, and wish for something more real and true: am I right still?"

"Yes," replied the girl, thinking her friend a perfect soothsayer; "how can one help being vexed with it, and with one's self?"

"I'm afraid I'm so used to it that it doesn't distress me as it does you. I've knocked about a good bit, and have got

accustomed to swim with the tide. And yet, at times, all my life seems just a wasted nothingness!"—this with a heavy sigh.

"Why don't you resolve to make more of it for the future?" asked Maude.

"It's so hard for a fellow," he said; 'and luck has always seemed against me. There is one thing, though, that I feel might make me a different man."

"What is that?" she inquired with some hesitation, not knowing how far she was justified in putting the question.

Another pause, during which Maude thought she had offended him, and was trying hard to change the subject; but with that rigid immobility of mind which so often seizes people when they would give anything to think of an appropriate remark, nothing would occur to her by which to lead the talk into a safer channel, and she only sat there quite dumb, repeat-

ing to herself, "Why did I ask that question?—why did I ask that question?"

At last she looked up; he seemed about to speak, but stopped short in what he was going to say. "I should like to tell you, but I must not—at least, not now.—Are you going to Scotland this summer?" he went on in a louder voice.

"I don't think so," she replied, half disappointed and half relieved; "my cousin was there last year, but I believe she is not going again. What I should like best, I think, would be to go abroad for a bit in the autumn. Imagine! I have never been out of England."

"And I have travelled so much that I think there is no place like home," he replied. "By-the-by, I met in Ireland a man who must be a neighbour of yours at Selby—Walter Grenville; you know who I mean?"

"Oh yes! he paid me a long visit the day before I left, and I liked him so much."

"All right there," thought Eustace, "otherwise she would not praise him like that."

"I see his agent has just been shot in Ireland. I suppose he is detained there, for the landlady of a set of rooms in St. James's Street that I wanted for a friend, told me that he had taken them several weeks ago, and had never turned up."

"I hope he will come soon. I should like to see him; it would be like a bit of home."

"You don't call this home, then?"

"Oh yes, of course; but in a different way to Selby."

"I never know quite what it is that makes home, home. It isn't the mere fact of living in a place; I am sure thus far."

"I think one is at home anywhere, with

the people whom one loves. You see, never had any one beside my aunt, and she was like a real, good, kind mother to me;" and the tears came into her eyes "But the place has a great deal to do with it too. I did love Selby so."

"Yes; and of course you cannot live there now—alone. If circumstances altered . . . Perhaps some day you will live there again."

"Ah, not for many years, I am afraid not till I am quite old—thirty, perhaps."

"There would be one change of circumstances which might make it possible. Don't you think so?—Oh, please, Lady Loder, let me help you;" for Lady Loder's flounce had caught round the leg of the chair, and was being pulled off by the yard, as she rose to greet a fresh visitor.

The damage was temporarily repaired, and Eustace Simmonds took his departure,

saying as he did so to Lady Loder, "The bachelors of my club are going to give a large water-party at Maidenhead, when the weather gets warmer, and I have undertaken the management. I hope you will let me have the pleasure of sending you and Miss Loder a card for it."

And Lady Loder replied, much to her young cousin's satisfaction, "Thank you; I am sure we shall like very much to go to it."

As Mr. Simmonds walked along Piccadilly he reviewed his afternoon's work, but though he had good hopes that everything was progressing according to his wishes, he felt wonderfully little satisfied. He could not banish a sense of shame at the baseness of his conduct towards Maude. In the case of Miss Gubbins, his Manchester heiress, he had experienced nothing of the kind; it was a half-recognized thing that

he was to earn a fortune, and she a rise in social position; but here it was quite different. Maude was so innocent, so trusting, so ready to believe all his fine speeches, and so beautiful when she looked up with her honest brown eyes, and that little quiver on her lips. He had not felt so like a villain for a long time. And yet he had not been altogether acting a part when he said, "There was one thing he felt would make him a different man;" it had come across him that a life spent with that gentle, holy-looking girl, might be happier than anything to which he was accustomed; and he tried to shake off his compunctions by thinking of all the efforts he would make, should he win her, to keep her happy, and prevent her from ever knowing how entirely mercenary his original motives had been. It was satisfactory, at any rate, to find that her London

home was not all she could wish for. "She has a good deal of quiet determination, I should think; and if I can once persuade her, she will stand out against the old lady's objections. I fancy, somehow, that she does not influence Maude much."

And Maude? She was full of lightheartedness and spirits. She gaily discussed with the visitors, who came before the end of the afternoon, the dust in the streets; the difficulty of finding a good dressmaker who was not extortionate; the destruction which pointed high heels are to the foot; and, once and again, that remarkable fact that, nowadays, nearly everybody has ceased to drink sugar in their tea. But when they were all gone, she rushed off to her room, and gave herself up to unreasoning happiness. She went through the whole of her talk with Eustace Simmonds, and thought how

nice it was of him to have remembered her in the country, and how good of him it was to have called as soon as he came back, and how kind and understanding he was, and how altogether superior to the other men whom she was in the habit of meeting. And then the access of humility came over her, from which, I suppose, the most conceited person is not wholly free at such moments, and she shrank up as she reflected how dull and inexperienced she must seem to a clever man like that, and how very far below him she was in every respect.

She liked him, too, for never alluding to her looks—a reticence which she did not always find in her friends. She thought, however, from his way, that he admired her. She went and looked in the glass, and the flushed, radiant face that she saw reflected delighted her. "I'm so glad I

am pretty," she thought; "it is something to have one gift."

And yet Maude was not in love with Eustace Simmonds.

"This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
Most common . . ."

What a lesson there is in those words, "This is not love." If Elaine had been a stronger nature, she would have lived, as Launcelot said, to "smile at her own self." She did not believe them, and she died. And how many girls since then have ruined their lives by a like mistake? They may be just out of the schoolroom, and flattered by the first attention they have ever received, and everything around them combines to nurse up this flutter of vanity, into a feeling which they imagine to be irrepressible, undying affection. Perhaps it is natural in them; but why confidantes, poems, and novels should all

unite to teach that such a fancy is love, and that, after this one love, all other is vapid and worthless, it is difficult to tell. Knowing what goes by the name, it is hard to understand the anxiety of men to assure themselves, that they are their *fiancée's* "first love."

That evening Lady Loder and Maude were dining at Sir Frederick Wingfield's, and, to Maude's great surprise and pleasure, the first person she saw on entering the room was Sir Walter Grenville, whom she accosted with unfeigned delight.

"Well, I never expected to meet you here! I am so glad to see you. It was only to-day I heard you were in Ireland still, and not likely to get away at present."

Sir Walter had till then been standing near the sofa, talking about the weather, and the rough passage he had had, to a

very young lady, who did not help the conversation much. He had glanced anxiously at the door every time it opened, and now at last had seen enter the object of his thoughts. There she was, just as of old, but more beautiful and more stately, and with a new grace, imparted to her chiefly by an ease of manner which had come of mixing with the world, and in some degree, also, by the perfect cut of her soft white gown.

"Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old,"

nor despise the services of a Parisian dressmaker.

The sound of her well-remembered voice was like music to his ear, and her friendly greeting gladdened his heart.

"I met Sir Frederick on the steamer," he said. "We discovered that he and my father had been at school together, and he

kindly asked me to dine with him to night."

"And how is everybody at home? Smut, to begin?"

"He's very well, but grown shamefully fat."

"He's a horribly greedy fellow; and I'm afraid you spoil him. Dear old doggie! how I should like to see him!"

When dinner was announced, Lady Wingfield sent off two or three couples in due order, and then said, "Sir Walter, will you take Miss Anstruther?" But Sir Walter, who had been reflecting on a plan of operation, if his fate should prove adverse, offered his arm to Maude, and said, "Miss Loder, may I take you to dinner?" And Lady Wingfield, who thought he had not heard her, said, "Ah! then, Mr. Teignmouth, will *you* take Miss Anstruther?" And so it was settled.

Walter and Maude had an immense deal
o talk about. She was craving for news
f the old place, and he was able to answer
ll her inquiries. Though she did not
uspect it, or think how he came to possess
o much knowledge, he had spent several
fternoons, before he left for Ireland, in
iding about in the neighbourhood, pick-
ng up small gossip about the inhabitants;
and he knew that Jenny Moore, who had
been badly burnt, was at school again; and
that the dam across the stream had burst,
and that the hay crop in the Lower Croft
had been hopelessly sanded; that Alice
Smith was going to marry the shoemaker's
son; and much more, which would be a
great deal less interesting to the reader
than to Miss Loder.

When the Selby news was exhausted,
he asked her about her doings since they
parted, and she talked to him with the

openness which people only show, when speaking of their own affairs, to those they know are really interested in them. At last he said—

"From whom did you hear that I was still in Ireland?"

And she, being taken aback, looked a little shy, and answered, "From Mr. Simmonds."

"Eustace Simmonds? I knew some one of that name in Dublin."

"Yes; he said he had known you in Ireland. Did you see much of him?"

"No, not very much."

"He is a pleasant person, I think." Now that the ice was broken, she wanted to hear Sir Walter's opinion of him.

"Yes, he is pleasant."

There was something curious in his face as he said this. Eustace had made a mistake in mentioning his former ac-

quaintance. However, happily for him, men are slower to repeat gossipy, half-proven tales against their neighbours, than are women; so he held his peace, and Maude did not venture to ask further questions.

Sir Walter was low in his spirits as he wended his way homewards that night. He was more attracted than before by Maude, and more impressed than ever with the smallness of his chance of pleasing her. "She knows such a host of people now," he said to himself. "Why should I expect her to care for me from among them all? And how am I to set to work with her? It is useless to hint how I have missed her, or say anything about the pleasure of seeing her again; she looks me straight in the face, and takes it all as a matter of course. She isn't a bit

spoilt, that's one comfort. What eyes she has, and what a smile!"

And Maude, the thankless and the unconscious, went home, and thought of Eustace—not of Walter. And Eustace wrote to the Jews, and asked for a fortnight's grace, at the end of which time, he believed, he would be able to make an arrangement with them.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES. R. T. T.

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

BY

MARY A. LEWIS,

AUTHOR OF "A RAT, WITH THREE TALES."

"All the endless occupation without purpose, and idleness without rest, of our vulgar world, are not, it seems to me, enjoyments we need be anxious to communicate. . . . To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over plough-share or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray,—these are the things that make men happy."—JOHN RUSKIN.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1881.

*(All rights reserved.)*

22498.13

1883. Feb. 28,
Gratis.

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

## CHAPTER I.

"It seemed as if the day were one
Sent from beyond the skies,
Which shed to earth above the sun
A light of Paradise."

SHELLEY.

DURING this time Christine and Maude had drawn together a good deal. We know the thoughts that were uppermost in the mind of each, and different as they were, there was still enough similarity in them to give the two girls a sort of fellow-feeling. Christine had paid several visits to Mrs. Menteith's, and Peter's attentions

had become so marked that she could hardly have misunderstood them; but every time she saw him she became more and more sure that she never could like him. Whether or no she could marry him she had not decided, and she determined to defer as long as possible the evil day on which she would be called on to make up her mind. All this she confided to Maude; and she, who at the moment felt that, if a man were not Eustace Simmonds, it did not much signify who he was, received the communication sympathetically. It was a relief to discuss some one's love affairs, though she would not mention her own. But Christine, after Mr. Simmonds had called two or three times more in Hertford Street, and had assumed a position of increasing intimacy, had guessed the state of the case; and so, although Maude did not openly talk about the matter, Christine

entered enough into her ideas to be able often to say little things that fitted into Maude's mood, and she in return grew more and more fond of her.

The cousins were both the better for the experiences they were going through. There is always something wanting in a girl who has never given or received affection of that sort. Till then they look upon loving and being loved, either as an excitement, a triumph, a road to a good marriage, or (and this among many of the better sort) as an intensely comic thing; a temporary aberration of intellect, to be treated with scorn and mockery by all persons of sense. Till lately Christine had longed for admirers as a means of release from her Falconbridge life; and Maude had looked at her engaged neighbours, and thought how supremely ridiculous they were. But now it was different with

both. Christine was beginning to feel very apologetic to her poor vulgar friend, who, spite of his freckles and dust-coloured hair, she could see was growing sincerely attached to her, and for whom she could not conjure up the least responsive feeling. His admiration, instead of pleasing, burdened and bored her, and often she would have been glad if he would have restored his allegiance to Miss Esmé Beech. Maude had, on the other hand, grown suddenly tolerant of the follies she had once scorned, and could even witness without a laugh that most peculiar symptom of the malady, the impulse of two young people to sing in church from the same hymn-book, when there are plenty of spare ones in the seat. The whole thing struck her in a new light, and she began to perceive the beauty and pathos underlying this and other kindred sillinesses.

One morning Christine found two letters in her plate, both in well-known handwritings; one was from her mother, the other from Mrs. Menteith. She opened the one with the Falconbridge postmark first, and found it ran thus:—

"My dearest Christine,

"Times are very bad here, and the tradesmen are getting impertinent about their bills. Marmont put a penny a pound on the beef last week, and when I found fault, said it was interest for the unpaid quarter. Then I threatened to take my custom away, and he replied it was a precious custom to take anywhere, and I was quite welcome. The grocer was nearly as bad. Really, the insolence of the lower classes nowadays is shocking; I think it must be all along of those board schools.

"Fifty pounds would clear us, but where to turn for them I don't know! Do you think you could get them from Lady Loder? We would be sure to pay her before the end of the year; and really, as she takes you away from your own flesh and blood, she ought to do something for you. Not but what I am glad you are not here, as it makes one mouth less to feed.

"Charlotte gave warning on Tuesday because of the Australian mutton, so we shall be without a servant. Beatrix could do the cooking; but I don't wish her to get her hands red, especially now, for which I have a reason.

"From what I hear, you don't seem to be doing much for yourself in London. I am not sure somebody is not doing more here; but that's between you and me and the post.

"Mrs. Skipton has taken Charlotte,

which, after her mean conduct to me about the mutton, is not acting like a lady. I have told Bee not to bow to Lucy Skipton in church.

"Hoping you are well, I remain

"Your affectionate mother,

"ARABELLA RANSOME.

"P.S.—Twelve o'clock. The shoemaker has just sent in his account. Four pairs of boots, and a charge of three shillings and sixpence for putting new elastics to my old ones! Help us, Christine, if you can."

The girl hastily thrust this missive into her pocket; it was quite impossible that she should make any such application to Lady Loder, who had already laid out a sum which Falconbridge imagination would hardly grasp, on her dress. And this was home! And in this home she would

have to live, perhaps doing the cooking to save Beatrix's hands from growing red What did her mother's hints about Bee mean? Could the curate be falling in love with her?

No, she could never go back there to stay! She would be a governess. But alas! in these days of horrid examinations and certificates, young ladies can no longer find situations on the strength of possessing "Brewer's Guides" to most subjects. Happily there was that other alternative. She opened the second letter, and read as follows:—

"My darling Christine,

"We are planning an expedition to St. Albans, by coach, on Wednesday next. We mean to take the whole of the outside, and to spend a *delightful* day.

"It will be all spoilt if *you* will not

accompany us; at least, I know one of our party who would fail us! But you will come, dearest; will you not? Do you think you could persuade Miss Loder, of whom I have heard *so much*, to join us? So dear a friend of my Christine's would be more than welcome.

"Ever your most loving

"AUGUSTA."

On this latter effusion Lady Loder was consulted, and advised that Christine should accept, but hesitated about Maude.

"You see, I don't know Mrs. Menteith, and she is no chaperon for you."

"Please let me go, Cousin Mary; I should like to see the abbey, and I should enjoy a whiff of fresh air more than I can say."

"I wonder if Effie would go. If she would take you I should not mind."

"I'll write at once," said Maude. "You would have no objection, would you, Christine, to ask Mrs. Menteith to let her be of the party?"

"Oh dear, no!" said Christine.

A few hours later Maude received an answer from Mrs. Carew, saying that both she and Maurice would willingly go if it could be managed; and as Mrs. Menteith was "only too delighted to extend her invitation to dear Mrs. Carew," it was all easily arranged.

Wednesday came, and the weather was propitious. The party arrived two and three at a time at the White Horse Cellar. There were Mr. and Mrs. Menteith (the latter arrayed in a rather remarkable yachting toilette, and a sailor's hat), and Peter in a yellow suit that exactly matched his freckles. A servant followed, bearing a huge luncheon-basket. Next came Effie

and Maurice, with the two girls; then Mr. Escrick, a young man of twenty-one, chosen apparently so as not to be a rival to Peter; and then Mr. and Mrs. Manton—she a very *outrée*-looking young lady, in an extremely tight white jersey and a scarlet velvet Tam o' Shanter, and he a subdued little man, who was three-quarters hidden behind the armload of wraps and rugs which he carried for his wife.

"Where are Mr. and Miss Langley?

"I'm afraid they will be late."

"I think I see them coming now."

"No."

"Please take your seats; it is within three minutes of starting time."

There was a scramble up the steps as Augusta marshalled them all to their places. Christine and Peter, Mrs. Manton and Mr. Escrick, sat in front; Mr. Menteith on the box-seat; the rest behind.

"Give us just five minutes' law, in c
our two friends should arrive."

But the coachman was inexorable; a
as the clock struck they started.

No one spoke much at first; they w
all occupied with the novelty of the po
tion, and with a slight anxiety as to h
they should steer through the crowd
Bond Street; but they soon found th
was nothing to fear, and began to
amused at the way the foot-passengers
turned round to gaze up at them, and w
the glimpses they got into the first flo
of the shops and houses.

"Should you object to filling the vaca
places, if there should be any passenge
waiting at the Langham?" asked t
guard.

"None at all," replied Mr. Menteith.

As they drew up, a man was seen stan
ing on the pavement, who, after a sho

rley with the guard, began climbing up e side of the coach.

Maude could hardly refrain from utter- g an exclamation when his face became sible; it was none other than Eustace immonds!

"I believe I ought to ask this lady if I ay occupy the spare seat," said he, taking ff his hat to Mrs. Menteith, who gladly ccorded her permission; then, turning to Maude, he continued, "I have long wanted o see the abbey, and I am fortunate in inding so many friends;" and, in a lower voice, "I hope you are not angry with me?"

Maude said "No," and nothing more; but her prospect of enjoyment had in- creased tenfold.

"I heard of your intended expedition, and made up my mind to take my chance of a place, if it had to be an inside one; but I'm lucky for once."

The fact was, more and more pressu
was being put on him by his tradesme
A creditor had threatened immediate pr
ceedings unless he were satisfied, and h
refused to listen to any expostulations
entreaties. At last, with great hesitatio
Eustace had taken out of his desk thir
pounds of the subscriptions which h
been handed over to him for the Maide
head party, and sent the man away. Aft
all, he said to himself, it didn't muc
matter; he had money coming in a wee
hence, and he should then put the si
notes back at once. But the tailor whi
pered in confidence to his brother-in-law
the cigar-dealer, that that slippery fello
Simmonds seemed rather flush of mone
just now; and this worthy hastened dow
forthwith with his account, and a tale o
a broken bank, which obliged him to as
for immediate settlement.

Again Eustace's powers of persuasion proved vain, and he was obliged to give him a cheque for twenty-five pounds more of the water-party fund, which stood in his name at his banker's. Simmonds had less compunction at the dishonourable means he had used for extricating himself from his difficulty, than many another man would have felt. There were other deeds of as questionable a kind hidden behind the veil of the past, and his conscience was not susceptible. Moreover, he was a good dissembler, and so it came that he looked just as usual as he left his rooms and ran against Captain Hotham.

"Good morning, Hotham. Where are you off to at this early hour?"

"I'm going to the Cellar to see the St. Albans coach start; the Loder girls are going on it, and a lot of their friends. Will you come?"

"No, thank you; I'm going up to Por land Place. Good-bye." And Eusta jumped into a hansom and drove to t Langham Hotel, in hopes of being ab to join the party there, without having betray to the captain that he wished go with them, and had not been aske or even known of their plan.

As the coach rolled along he did n embarrass Maude by singling her out, b talked to every one, and contributed ve much to the hilarity of the occupants the back seats. He chaffed Mrs. Mentei in a way that made Maude tremble, f fear she should suspect that she was bein made fun of; but that lady was qui impenetrably satisfied with herself, an perceived nothing.

"Were you at the last party at Somers House?" he inquired, gravely.

"Not at the last one," she replied-

which, indeed, was quite true. "How lovely the picture-gallery is! I could spend hours looking at those paintings. I am not sure I like all that white and gold; it looks chaste, certainly, but rather cold."

Mrs. Menteith had once been to a performance at Somerset House, given in aid of the Ophthalmic Hospital. She made a practice of attending charity concerts at all the big houses; she was then in a position to allude to them afterwards, as if she were one of the most intimate *habituées* of the place. She also made a point of taking all her servants from the higher grades of the peerage, and then sometimes, by insisting on a personal character, she made acquaintance with ladies whom she would afterwards talk of as "dear Lady Helmore," or "that sweet creature, Lady Janet Brisbane." However, her efforts were futile; she never

passed even into the outer courts of th
aristocracy. Perhaps, when the game
Wollaston is worked up, and there are
couple of thousand head to be killed in
day, the sporting members of the peera
will drag their unwilling spouses there
December, and shoot old Menteith's phe
sants and drink his claret and champagn
and laugh at him and his vulgar wif
but though the preliminaries are begu
the result is as yet small, and the outcon
uncertain.

Mrs. Menteith's method was old and wo
out, and therefore ineffectual. Nowada
there is a path which offers more chan
of success, but which somehow she miss
in her researches. She should have tak
a good house in Belgrave Square, a
engaged a *cordon-bleu*, and gone in
being eccentric and clever. Eccentric
is easily managed. She might, for instan

have chosen to be waited on by female servants only, selected for their good looks, and dressed in a becoming uniform. She might also have played some hitherto exclusively manly instrument (if one could be found); or, still better, one from Siberia or Burmah, for if no one had ever heard it before, high proficiency would be unnecessary.

The reputation for cleverness and æstheticism is less easy to gain, but a great deal may be done at little cost, by reading scientific and irreligious articles in reviews, (taking care to keep to those of last year, because, though they are not old enough to be antiquated, they are old enough to have been forgotten by the world, and they need therefore not be thoroughly understood, or accurately remembered) and by wearing very limp draperies, in Venetian red and plush, with puffed sleeves

slashed with appropriate hues. Thes garments must be carefully designed, with out regard to cost. Great is the art o puffing by means of puffs, but rich is th reward. There is an inarticulate languag in a puff that speaks volumes, and urge the beholder to throw aside all grovelling considerations, and meet in the grand sisterhood of sympathetic souls, manifested to the world through arrangements in "terra-cotta."

It is also essential to have doubts, which should never be stated, for fear some officious friend should remove them; and to attend some ritualistic church with great regularity. If called to account for this apparent inconsistency, it is preferable if possible, to quote German; but if this cannot be managed, there are good phrases going, about the "æsthetic sensibilities o man's higher nature." These should be

murmured, as they sound best when only partially audible.

I cannot but think that, if Mrs. Menteith had tried this line, combining it, perhaps, with the old-fashioned plan of giving first-rate concerts, she would at least have made her way into that smaller section of smart society which frequents sales at Christie's, has intellectual difficulties, and longs for slashed puffs which it dares not mount.

The party on the front seat were getting on happily. Mrs. Manton had at first been rather disappointed at finding Peter's attention entirely taken up with Christine, but she made the best of a bad business, and bestowed her smiles on a worthier recipient, Mr. Escrick. She had already confided to him that her parents had insisted, when she was only seventeen, on marrying her to "poor Charles," and that,

though she could imagine many wo
who would have been happy with him,
alas!—and then she sighed. But perha
was foolish to expect too much; she
afraid she had been a silly romantic li
thing when she married, but she had ho
for sympathy, and for some great h
being who would love her and help l
but somehow, "poor Charles!"—and t
she sighed again.

And Mr. Escrick had said that if
Manton didn't love and sympathise w
her, he had better not have spoilt ot
people's chance of doing so; and M
Manton had gone on to bewail that he di
know French, and so couldn't apprec
those delicious novels that she was so f
of. Happily she had friends who und
stood her better, and though mamma s
a young married woman couldn't be
careful, she thought dear mamma di

realize what mental starvation life with an uncongenial soul is, to a fresh young nature; and Mr. Escrick looked upon her as a lovely, ill-used, lonely creature sighing for intellectual companionship, and longed to kick "Charles" for his ill-usage of his beautiful treasure.

"Do you see this, Miss Ransome?" said Peter to Christine, showing her a round leather box.

"What is it?"

"A pocket aneroid. I was so awfully anxious about the weather for to-day, that I bought it so as to be able to look constantly."

"What a pretty little thing! Did it prophesy good weather?"

"Yes; it is at 'fair.' Should you have come if it had rained?"

"I don't mind a few showers."

"Then I wish it had rained; for the

rest"—nodding backwards to denote th
fellow travellers—"would have stayed
home, and you and I should have go
together. I should have liked it awfull
Should you?"

"Well, really, I don't think the othe
hurt us. The more the merrier, in n
opinion."

"You don't feel for me as I do for yo
Miss Ransome—that I can see. I shou
be glad to go all round the world with y
—quite, quite alone."

"You would be very glad to get r
home," said Christine, "for I should d
appear when the ship started, and only
emerge at the landing-place; I am t
worst sailor that ever was. Do you li
the sea?"

"Well, I haven't travelled much. Stup
work travelling alone. Shouldn't you li
to see Mont Blanc, or the Falls of Niaga
or something?"

"Yes, very much."

"I've been at the Lake of Como. My eye! how I should like to walk beside it with you, and hear the nightingales singing, and look at the moon, and do all that sort of thing, you know!"

"Really, Mr. Menteith, you are getting quite poetical. Shall we talk of something else besides ourselves. I think they told us there was an old battle-field somewhere in the neighbourhood: do you know where it is? Barnet, I believe, was the name."

"No," growled Peter, crossly.

"Do you remember when the battle was fought?"

"Oh, I suppose in the civil wars; it's always safe to say that."

"Mr. Escrick," said Christine, "I dare say you can tell us when the Battle of Barnet was fought."

Mr. Escrick had not so long left
crammer's that he had forgotten
metrical history of England. He quick
ran over in his head—

"At Barnet next brave Warwick falls, in 1471,
And in the same year Tewkesbury too, the cr
Edward won."

"Yes," he said bravely, "it was in t
Wars of the Roses, in 1471; Warwick w
killed there. It was just before the Bat
of Tewkesbury."

"What a mind!" murmured Mrs. M
ton. "That is what I miss in Charles;
has never been able to answer any quest
that was asked him, within my recoll
tion."

Peter grew more and more irate, a
said, "I hope you are not going to f
with that young ass."

And Christine replied, "I never f
with anybody; and besides, please reme

ber that it is no business of yours who I flirt with;" and they were so near quarrelling that Peter had to apologize, and they were again reconciled.

## CHAPTER II.

"She looks and her heart is in heaven; but
fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not
And the colours are all passed away from her e
WORDSWOR

WHEN they arrived at St. Albans,
Menteith servant emerged from the in
of the coach, and very soon raised
lobster salads, and Devonshire cream
spread on the already well-covered tabl
the inn. After luncheon they all sta
for the abbey, Mrs. Menteith saying,
a knowing look at Peter—

"I think we had all better keep togeth
but in case any one should get separ

from the rest, remember the coach leaves at four, and we must all be at the hotel punctually at that time."

Now that the party was broken up into smaller groups, Eustace no longer made any secret of his wish to appropriate Maude, and they strolled off together.

"Do you remember the bit at the beginning of 'Romola,'" said she, "where it talks of Old Florence and New Florence; and how, after all, the things that change in the world, are as nothing to the things that do not change? The sight of that old tower reminded me of it so strongly."

"Yes, I remember the piece," he replied. "That tower hasn't changed much, I dare say, since the day it was finished; and human nature doesn't change much either. I can quite imagine that, on that day, a man and a woman walked beneath in its shadow, as we are doing now, and thought

the same thoughts which we are think
now. Shall I tell you what those two w
thinking of—or the man, at any rate?'

"If you like," responded Maude, look
straight before her, and seeing nothing

"I fancy, as he walked with the girl
longed to tell her all that was in his mi
but dared not, because her father had fl
and herds, and he was poor. And
thought how, if from his youth he c
have foreseen this hour, he would h
toiled and striven till he had many m
sheep and oxen than her father posses
and could have offered all to her.
now their positions were reversed; he
wasted his time, and had nothing. I
had told her all this, what do you supp
the girl would have said? Can you gues

But Maude had no answer to make,
at this moment she espied two tour
who were contemplating them with op

glasses from the top of the tower; so she turned hastily away, saying, "I really don't know. Shall we join Effie? there she is."

They moved on, but did not go in search of Mrs. Carew. They entered the abbey, and wandered about in it together for a time, and then Eustace said, "It is so cold here. Shall we go outside into the sunshine?" And Maude went. To this day she knows nothing of the architecture of the abbey, or the relics of St. Alban, or the monuments of any of the distinguished persons who lie buried there.

They walked on for about ten minutes, leaving the little town, and taking a path into the fields.

"It is very hot here," observed Maude. "Don't let us go much further; because, as they say to the children, remember we have to go back."

"Why not sit down under this tr
And so saying he spread a shawl of
which he was carrying, on the ground,
they encamped in the shade. She wa
a very silent mood; she had a weigh
her heart, and yet she was happy;
would not trouble herself by conside
what all this was leading to, she would
enjoy. And the willow leaves over
made a fresh, pleasant flapping sound,
the shadows came chasing each other ac
the meadow, quite as gaily as if long
perience had not taught them that
would never catch one another; and t
was a pleasant hum of flies, and a s
smell of spring blossoms; and they sat
watched a lazy, silly-looking old sh
who was chewing the cud, and wit
well-regulated mind was biting
mouthful exactly sixty-one times be
swallowing it.

For some minutes neither spoke. Then Eustace said—

"I can hardly understand that to the rest of the world this is just a common day like any other; to me it has that feeling of being apart and distinct from all others, which just a few days in one's life have."

"Don't say that," replied Maude. "All the days which I remember with that set-apart feeling, are associated with great sorrows. I would rather think of this one as just an ordinary bright pleasant spring day."

"But a great joy would carve out a day from one's life just as much as a great sorrow. Perhaps there is something hanging over me, that will make this for ever after a red-letter day to me."

"Let us hope so. Who can tell? Are you a person who keeps anniversaries?"

she asked, talking rather fast, and just
way of breaking an awkward silence.

"No. I haven't had enough plea
things happen to me, to make me l
anniversaries. I've never had a ho
for I can't get on with my father;
I've knocked about all over the wo
with people who didn't care a rap for
or I for them; and I've never had mo
enough to do what I wished; and
they've given me this place in the of
I can only just get along, and barely t
Money, or rather want of money, is
curse of life!" he exclaimed fierc
"It's nonsense to say that love of mo
is the root of all evil; it's scarcity
money that is the root; and meann
and misery, and wickedness are
branches!"

Maude was half-frightened at his ve
mence.

"It isn't a thing I know much about," she said gently. "I've always had enough; but I am sure it must be very hard to bear."

"Don't let us talk of it," he said more calmly; "let us be happy just for to-day. What is that tree with the curious greenish blossom?"

They got up and walked on, dawdling about in the warm sunshine, till Maude, looking at her watch, cried, "Do you know, it is getting very late. We must hurry back as fast as we can."

"Couldn't we miss the coach, and go back by rail in the evening?"

"No, certainly not! Come, make haste!"

"And spend another three hours with that awful woman with the sailor's hat, and the duchesses! Who is she?"

"A distant relation of Christine's."

"And that yellow youth is her son?"

"Yes."

As they walked up the street, they saw the party assembling in front of the inn door, and when they came near, Effie advanced, and said to Maude—

"Will you come and look at the things in the curiosity shop? There is just time before the coach starts. Mr. Simmonds, please tell my husband where I am gone. I think he is in the stables looking at the horses. Now, dearie," she went on, as they turned away, "I have got to say something very meddlesome and disagreeable to you, and which I can't help saying, though it makes me miserable to have to do it. I don't want to ask you any questions, but I can't help seeing that there is something going on between you and Eustace Simmonds. Mrs. Manton has been joking about it, and saying she had

heard he was engaged to you, but had never believed it, because she thought he was too well known. And, Maude, she is right. He is not a nice person—not worthy or good. There are all sorts of stories about him, some of which Maurice knows to be true; and you know how slow he is to believe evil of any one. He has been perfectly wretched since you and Mr. Simmonds walked away, and has been blaming me for not keeping you with me."

Maude walked silently along, her face burning, and her heart full of pain. "I can't believe it," she said, in a shaky voice. "Maurice must be mistaken."

"I wish I could think so," replied Effie, sadly. "But, at any rate, I am sure you will do something to please me, will you not? You will sit in front, with Mr. Manton and Maurice and me, and not let

things go any further to-day. It need not make any difference afterwards, but you will do this to please me, won't you?"

They were looking blankly through the window of the curiosity shop, at a blue pot with a dragon on it, and three Japanese plates. Maude said one word, "Yes," and they walked back to the coach. Effie whispered something to her husband, who got up and gave Maude a hand; Effie followed, then Mr. Manton; and when Eustace came out of the stable yard, he found the only vacant place was behind. He stood for a moment in the archway with a scowl which did not improve his countenance, and then mounted to his seat at the back, where he sat in gloomy silence.

Nor was he the only one of the party who was in a bad humour. Peter had started in the mood of Lorenzo—

" . . . 'I may not speak;
And yet I will, and tell my love all plain.'
So said he one fair morning, and all day
His heart beat awfully against his side;
And to his heart he inwardly did pray
For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice, and pulsed resolve away."

He had done his best to draw Christine aside from the rest of the folks, but she had pertinaciously refused to gratify his evident wish, and he had not dared to insist. This was cause enough for his depressed spirits; and then, to make bad worse, Eustace Simmonds had placed himself on the other side of Miss Ransome, and Peter could not imagine any one being for ten minutes near his beloved, without falling in love with her. How he wished that he could sit on both sides of her at once! He need not have agitated himself, however, on this occasion, for nothing was further from Mr. Simmonds's thoughts than

any wish to engross his neighbour's attention. Peter was reassured, and half-angry, when he perceived that he did not even address a remark to her.

The chief talkers were Mrs. Manton and Mr. Escrick, who continued their flirtation with unremitting vigour, and conversed unceasingly in a low voice. The young man was revolving a plan for calling on the morrow, and was burning with jealousy at the thought that "Major Tenby was the person who, *till now*, had understood her best," though the emphasis on the words "till now" consoled him a little.

It will hardly be anticipating history unduly to record that, when he went to see Mrs. Manton, he found her sitting in her boudoir, dressed in a bewitching rose-coloured tea-gown, drinking tea with Major Tenby, and that the constrained tone which fell on the conversation made him

feel that it would be wise to curtail his visit; whilst a gay laugh, which sounded before he had well closed the door behind him, was painfully suggestive of the fact that the muffins were being salted with jokes that he would not have savoured. He fled, never to return, and has since become an older and a wiser man.

Mrs. Menteith was the only person who seemed disposed to hold forth for the benefit of the rest, and Christine had to listen to many stories about the bazaar at which Lady Duncover had begged her to hold a stall; the *crêche* which she had founded at Wollaston, on the model of Prince Charles's in Germany; and the new contralto singer she was going to bring out.

When they drew up at the White Horse Cellar, there was, of course, the usual crowd to watch the unloading of the

coaches, and numerous were the remarks made on the young ladies as they descended. Effie put her two charges quickly into a cab, but not before Eustace Simmonds had time to say, in an undertone, to Maude—

"Is this the way in which we are to be parted? May I come to-morrow morning, and have a little talk with you, by yourself?—I shall come!" he cried after her, as, with averted face, she jumped into the cab.

The rattle and noise of Piccadilly, and the slow creeping in and out among the carriages, after her high position on the coach, made the poor girl quite giddy. When they reached Hertford Street, she said—

"Christine, will you go upstairs? I want to say something to Effie in the dining-room." And Christine did as she was told.

"I hope you are not vexed with me, Maude," said Effie, seeing that she did not know how to begin.

"No, indeed, dear," replied Maude, giving her a friendly little stroke; "I know how you disliked saying what you had to say. I am sorry for you, not a bit vexed. But now I want your advice. Did you hear what he said as we drove off?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Carew, full of commiseration.

"Are you sure of what you said today?" Maud asked, looking her straight in the face.

"Quite! perfectly sure. He's been in money difficulties all his life."

"If that is all," exclaimed Maude, "he told me that himself."

"No, dear, but that isn't all. He hasn't always come out of the difficulties with clean hands. There was a property of

which he had the care, for a young nephew, and of which the accounts didn't come right by a large sum; there was talk of an inquiry, but somehow it was all hushed up. Then there was a terrible fuss about some card dealings at Homburg; but, as it was not in this country, I suppose it was let pass; and, Maude, though it is very painful to me to tell you, Maurice found out from Mr. Manton, that what was said at his club, was that Simmonds was more under water than ever, but had told some one he was going to put it right by marrying an heiress. You are so dear and good and pretty, Maudie, that I couldn't bear you to marry some one who was not quite above a suspicion of wanting your money."

"What on earth am I to do about to-morrow?"

"Make an excuse, and don't see him."

"Oh no; I can't have that hanging over me."

"Does Aunt Mary know anything about this?"

"No, I'm sure she doesn't."

"But you can't receive visitors privately in her house without telling her."

"It is a miserable business altogether," cried Maude, passionately. "I can't tell her."

"Shall I see her whilst you go upstairs and rest?"

"Thank you. Yes, please do."

Effie went to the drawing-room, and found Lady Loder in a great state of excitement. She had seen Lady Wingfield that afternoon, and she had inquired if it was true that her young cousin was engaged to Eustace Simmonds. Lady Loder had said, "Certainly not. It had never been thought of." But afterwards the idea

had suddenly flashed upon her that there might after all be some such intention on the gentleman's part, and she had resolved that his frequent visits must cease. Then Christine had come in, and had told her that he had been of the party, and that he and Maude had been a good deal together during the day, and Lady Loder felt in despair.

She knew quite well that Eustace Simmonds did not bear a good character, but she was one of those people who overlook a great deal in a pleasant companion; and as to any difficulty with either of the girls, she had never even thought of it. There had been so few troubles of the kind in Effie's time, that Lady Loder had quite given up standing on the defensive. He was so utterly penniless, too; with nothing at all now, and not more than five hundred a year to come when his father died.

Lady Loder had thought it would be so nice if Maude married Lord Glamorgan's eldest son, Lord Rotherby. Anyhow, this must be put a stop to at once. She was in this frame of mind when Effie came in.

On hearing of the proposed visit on the morrow, the old lady indignantly exclaimed, "He shan't set foot inside the house!"

But Effie tried to persuade her differently. "No, Aunt Mary, let him come; she's sure to meet him somewhere. Don't do anything violent against him. If you take my advice, you will say very little about it to her, and nothing at all about the want of money. Just point out that he is a man of no character, and be very kind and nice; and, above all, don't find fault with her. I don't think she cares very much about him; but she is just in a mood

to be scolded into declaring she will marry him and him only."

"But she's not twenty yet, Effie; she can't marry him without my permission."

"I suppose you don't want to fight it, auntie. She will refuse him herself, if you let her alone."

"Well, you young people always think you know best; and perhaps you're right about this."

So, when Maude came down to dinner, looking rather white and tired, no unpleasant remarks were made; and it was not till she was all by herself in her bedroom that Lady Loder came in and said, "I am going to take Christine to Marshall's to-morrow morning, Maude, so you will have the drawing-room to yourself. Effie has told me what has happened, and I don't want to bother you; but I must just say that my opinion is quite as strong

as hers on the matter. I ought never to have let Mr. Simmonds come to the house as I have done, for I have always known what he was. You, Maude, have all sorts of fancies and principles that even I think overstrained, and he is a man of no principle at all. I trust to you to do what is right. Good night."

And Maude said, "Good night," and they parted. And then the poor child sat in her bedroom and thought. Though she did not say so to herself, her mind was made up. After what she had heard, she could not accept him, nor did she know that she wished to do so; only she did know that she did not wish to send him away never to meet again. Till to-day she had not realized that anything definite would come of all this, but had just allowed herself to grow interested in his society without dwelling on aught be-

yond. He was a much quicker man than most of those in Lady Loder's circle of acquaintance; he had seen people, things, and places of all sorts, and had a sympathetic insight into her likes and dislikes, which made him a friend, according to the definition which says that a friend is "some one who can finish your sentences for you." She had never talked to him about any subject which betrayed his want of fixed principle; she held the theory that those who thought most of the difference between right and wrong, often said least about it, and that those who had the highest and noblest aspirations, shrank most from making a show of them; and so she set down from her imagination, large sums of all the possible virtues, to his account.

And now, as she pondered over these things, it seemed to her as if her acquaintance with Eustace Simmonds had begun

and ended years ago, and as if she were reviewing an event which had happened in the distant past, till that awful impending interview came before her with sudden horrible distinctness, and she shivered as she thought of it. Presently the candle went out with a splutter, and she crept to bed in the dark, and lay awake a long time, thinking the same weary old thoughts over and over again, till at last, in the small hours of the morning, she fell into a restless sleep.

Eustace Simmonds had gone to his club in no amiable mood. The sudden change in Maude's manner had led him to suppose that she had, as he said to himself, been "set against him," and he felt furious at the thought of losing the prize which he believed to have been nearly within his grasp. Besides, the reflection that he had paid away fifty-five pounds of money which

did not belong to him, weighed upon him more and more, now that the means by which he had intended helping himself out of his difficulties seemed to become less and less available.

He was handling an evening paper whilst these meditations were passing through his mind, and a paragraph suddenly caught his eye: "Mr. Chandos has arrived from America, and will reside at the Alexandra Hotel for the season."

Few others had noticed his announcement, and those only to say, "I wonder who this Mr. Chandos is, whose visit is considered worth informing the public of?" But to Mr. Simmonds it told a further tale. Mr. Septimus Chandos was a rich American merchant, whom Eustace had, when in the Western States, rescued from some roughs who were attacking him, and who had sworn eternal gratitude, and

promised to requite his friend's services at any time and in any way he might desire it. "Here is a stroke of luck at last," thought the young man; and he went to a writing-table and wrote—

"DEAR CHANDOS,

"I little thought I should ever have occasion to claim your kind offer of helping me in time of need, still less that I should be obliged to trouble you the instant you had set foot on British soil; but I am in a regular fix for want of" (here he paused, and made an airy two hundred pounds, just to see what it would look like. "I may as well put a higher figure whilst I am about it," he thought, "and make it five hundred") "five hundred pounds. I can't tell you the cause; it would be too long a story; but I should be truly grateful if you could manage to lend it me for four months.

"I am very glad you have carried out your old intention of coming to England. I shall hope to see you soon.

"Yours very sincerely,

"EUSTACE SIMMONDS."

"There!" he said to himself, as he threw his letter into the box, "he can hardly refuse me a miserable five hundred pounds, after saving his life. So, even if things go wrong to-morrow, I shall have enough to replace that cursed fifty-five pounds, and keep me going for a good bit. What shall I be doing this time to-morrow? I'm sure the girl likes me, but those relations, I'm afraid, will stand in the way. I believe that, if I had the money and she none, I'd marry her all the same; that trustful way of hers comes round me tremendously. However, Chandos' arrival is a real godsend, else, if

Maude said 'No,' where should I have been?" After which, he smoked another cigar, had a brandy-and-soda, and went back to Jermyn Street.

## CHAPTER III.

"Unless you can think, when the song is done,
None other is soft in the rhythm;
Unless you can feel, when left by one,
That all men else go with him;
Unless you can know, when unpraised by his breath,
That your beauty itself wants proving;
Unless you can swear, 'For life, for death,'—
Oh! fear to call it loving."—E. B. BROWNING.

NEXT morning Maude came down rather late, so as to avoid part of the breakfast; and Christine, who had been the recipient of Lady Loder's lamentations on her own short-sightedness, Simmonds' presumption, and Maude's folly for the last half-hour, was quite prepared to take the burden of conversation off her friend's shoulders, and good-naturedly talked so energetically about

a bill that had been sent in a second time, that Maude was not obliged to speak much.

After breakfast, Lady Loder remained downstairs to order the dinner, and make sundry other domestic arrangements, and Christine followed Maude to the drawing-room.

"Shall I stay with you, Maudie," she said kindly, "or would you rather be alone?"

And Maude responded, crossly, "Oh, do go away, and let me be quiet!"

So Christine went.

By-and-by she heard Lady Loder's voice saying on the stairs, "Just fetch my purse off my dressing-table, Christine;" and then came descending footsteps, and the bang of the house door.

She took up the paper and tried to read, but the words made no more sense

than a column in a dictionary. Still she persevered resolutely, starting every time the bell rang, or footsteps sounded in the hall, and feeling as if, from the state of trepidation she was in, her face must look quite stiff and distorted.

At last the door opened, and her heart nearly stood still; but it was only the butler, who had come to say that the fishmonger had no red mullet that day, and to ask, on behalf of the cook, if whiting would do as well.

Ten minutes later there was another hand on the door-handle, and again she turned white with apprehension; but she found it was her maid, who wanted to know if she could be spared that evening to go to tea with some friends. When permission was granted, and Thomson was gone, Maude looked at the clock, and saw it was not yet half-past eleven. Surely it

must have stopped! But it was ticking placidly, as usual.

Suddenly there was a noise of barking, growling, and screaming in the street below, and, glad of a reason for moving, she went to the window to see what was going on. It was only a scrimmage between a dog and a cat. The terrier had run at it, and had got his ears boxed for his pains, whilst the cat stood with arched back, ready to inflict further chastisement. It was not worth looking at. She turned away, and as she did so, saw Eustace Simmonds before her.

"Good morning," he said. "I took the liberty of finding my own way up. I hope I didn't startle you?"

"A little. I was looking at the cat and dog fighting in the street," she said, fearful that he would think she had been watching for him.

"Oh yes; I know quite well what you were looking at," he replied. And she grew more painfully hot as she perceived that he saw through the motive of her explanation.

"I don't think he was much hurt, though he made such a fuss," she remarked, in a voice that sounded to her like somebody else's.

"Oh no!" he answered impatiently; "he's all right."

"Cats have such horribly sharp claws," she said, dreading what the first silence would bring, and clinging nervously to the subject in hand.

But Eustace had not come there to discourse on the natural history of the cat.

"I hope you were not over-tired, or in any way the worse for your long day yesterday?" he said.

"Not at all, thank you," she replied;

and then it seemed to her as if there were absolutely nothing to be said about anything in the whole world; and she sat stiff and silent, awaiting her fate.

"I thought it was the happiest day in my life, Maude, till—you know when! Why did you do it, dearest, and even turn away your face when I tried to catch your eyes, and make me miserable, as you did? Has somebody been setting you against me? for if so, by Heaven, it shall be the worse for them!"

He paused for an answer, but receiving none, he continued eagerly, earnestly—

"I've loved you, Maude, ever since the day when I first set eyes on you, and since then you have seldom been out of my thoughts; your brown eyes seem to be always upon me, keeping me from the bad and encouraging me to the good. If you send me away it will be my ruin; I know

it. But you won't do that, dear, will you? Say you love me just a little; I will be satisfied with ever so little. May I take your hand, as a sign that you care for me a little—in return for my great love for you?"

He put out his hand, but Maude resolutely drew hers away.

"Don't you like me the least bit?"

No answer.

"Promise to be my wife, darling, and make me what you like all my life long." Never before, he thought, had he seen so dumb a girl.

But at last she had found her voice; and now, too, the question was put in a more easily answered form. And when he repeated, "Will you be my wife?" she replied steadily—

"No, I cannot; don't ask me. I am very sorry to say anything to hurt you, but I cannot be your wife."

"It's all that hateful money that comes between us!" he cried fiercely. "I don't believe you dislike me; I have seen in your face and your manner that you don't. Do you think it is no pain to me to ask a girl to marry me, from whom I should have to receive what I ought to give? and do you think I should not feel the hard cruel things that the world would say of me? It is that calculating old woman with whom you live, who has done it, and her precious niece. She has gone out, and left you with orders to drive away a man who loves you as few women are loved, and all because he is poor."

"Not at all," said Maude, who had been touched by his first remarks, but whose spirit rose at being scolded; "it is entirely my own doing. I do not believe I should be happy if I married you, and I won't do it."

"Why should you not be happy?" he asked, with a softened voice. "I thought that real, deep, devoted love went far to make a woman happy; and besides, surely we have been friends—at least you'll admit that. I can't believe that you have disliked me all along."

"I don't dislike you," she replied stoutly. "I like you, but that isn't enough. I know I shouldn't be happy, and you would soon be tired of me; our ideas about everything are so different. No, don't say anything more about it," she went on, seeing that he was about to speak. "My mind is quite made up. Nothing that you can urge can make any difference; though, believe me, it makes me wretched to say all this."

"And is this to be my last answer? Should I have had any chance if I had waited? Might I even now, by dint of

patient, unwearying affection, win you at last?"

"No," she answered, her voice quivering. "Let us put an end to this. You had better go away; it is painful to us both."

"And so our friendship ends," he exclaimed bitterly, "and I have less faith in women than before, and God knows I never had much; for you have let me be with you, and get to love you, and you have spoken kind words to me in your sweet soft voice, and I have held your hand, and looked into your eyes, and you have drawn me on. And now you turn round and bid me begone. It has been cruel, shameful, heartless flirting, and I can call it by no other name. Whatever befalls me that is bad, in this world and the next, will be your doing."

He stood over her with passion in his

face, and she, feeling too miserable at the partial truth of his words to resent the injustice of the rest, quailed as she sat.

"Have you nothing to say?"

"Nothing, except good-bye."

He took his hat, and without replying left the room.

And Maude sat where he had left her, white, cold, and motionless. She could not even think. And yet it was yesterday that the bitterness had come and began to pass. When she heard from Effie what his true character was, then her ideal died, and the blow fell. She had struggled at first not to put trust in the tales she heard, but she knew Maurice and his wife were both of them loth to credit evil reports, and to spread them; she knew that in their eyes Simmonds' poverty would have been no impediment, so that they would not be prejudiced on that account, as Lady Loder

might have been; and, trusting them fully, there seemed but one course before her, and that course she had taken.

After a time she went up to her room, and sat there still and quiet as she had done downstairs, till a knock came at the door and Lady Loder entered.

"Well, dear?"

"Mr. Simmonds has been here—please don't let us talk about it."

And Lady Loder pushed back the auburn curls from the white forehead, and gave her a kiss, saying, "You have done for the best, I am certain, and now we will not say anything more about it. But, Maude, don't sit up here all alone; come down, and we'll make Christine sing to us whilst you arrange the flowers."

"Poor child!" the old lady thought, as she took off her bonnet; "I am afraid she is vexed. I think I will buy her that

Etruscan locket at Brogden's: there is nothing like a little jewellery for curing a girl's fancies."

Meanwhile Eustace Simmonds had walked home with gall and wormwood at his heart. He had grown more attached to Maude than he would have thought possible, and had been really pained by her refusal; then his vanity had been sorely wounded, for he who could generally get his own way with women, had on this occasion been utterly foiled; and then, worst of all, his money difficulties were ever present to him, and the thought of those payments he had made haunted him.

Matters were not improved by two notes which he found lying on his table in Jermyn Street. The first was from a money-lender to whom he had applied, and ran as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"Having made inquiries, we find there is no doubt that Lord Munstock was married on the 23rd of April, 1871, and that he has three sons and a daughter. We regret to say that, under the circumstances, we do not feel justified in advancing you any further sums.

"We remain, sir,

"Your obedient servants,

"TUCKER & CROSS."

Eustace tore it up with an expression of disgust.

The other was dated from the Alexandra Hotel, and ran thus :—

"BELOVED FRIEND,

"Since we parted a great change has come over my soul; the old things have passed away, and all things are

become new. I was converted, thanks be to the Lord, at the ninth hour of the third day of the fifth month, by the ministry of Brother Jonathan George, of whom you may have heard. Since then I have placed my fortune (the earthly dross that ruins many souls) in the hands of the brotherhood, to be spent on the erection of a college in Massachusetts, for the education of boys in the principles of the faith, and all I can now call my own is a monthly stipend which I have by their bounty. I have come by their desire to gather hints from the collegiate institutions of the mother country, but return very shortly to the United States. I would gladly discharge my obligation towards you, but I am assured I can best do so by praying that you may leave the paths of the world, which lead to the pit of destruction, and

become even such a one as he who now humbly signs himself

"Your sincere well-wisher,

"SEPTIMUS CHANDOS."

The exclamation with which Eustace Simmonds threw down this communication was too strong for ears polite, and he stood in moody silence leaning on the chimney-piece.

"Ah, good morning, Simmonds! I thought I should catch you before you went out. I'm come round to tell you that there's to be a meeting of the committee at four this afternoon, and that the day is to be fixed a week earlier than the one we thought of," said a voice cheerfully; and looking round he saw Percy Lane, his co-adjutor in the management of the water-party.

"I thought there were to be no more

meetings this week," responded Eustace, rousing himself, and accosting his unwelcome visitor cordially. "Why is the day put on?"

"Oh, the first clashes with something at Hurlingham, and now the weather is warm it doesn't matter. I've been whipping up some of the fellows who haven't paid yet, and we must settle which band to have, and who is to do the luncheon, and no end of other details. You can come at four, I suppose?"

"Yes. I'm going down to the office now, but I shall get away by then, or soon after, I dare say."

"All right. I shall see you later, then. Good-bye." And the young man departed.

## CHAPTER IV.

"Neither is this Second Fruit of Friendship, in opening the Understanding, restrained only to such Frends, as are able to give a Man Counsell: (They indeed are best) But even without that, a Man learneth of Himselfe, and bringeth his owne Thoughts to Light, and Whetteth his Wits as against a Stone, which itselfe cuts not. In a word, a Man were better relate to himselfe, to a Statua, or Picture, than to suffer his Thoughts to passe in Smother."—BACON.

ON the eventful day of the coach-party Mrs. Menteith had taken great pains to cultivate Effie's acqaintance, and before they separated had asked her to "bring Christine to her little afternoon 'at home.'"

Mrs. Carew had accepted, rather to Christine's surprise.

"You will find a very different set of

people at her house to those you are used to."

"All the better," replied she. "I have long ago given up Aunt Mary's 'shibboleths.' I like a party that is not in the old, old groove. The guests may 'take' tea, or even 'take lunch,' or say and do anything short of eating peas with their knife, and I remain perfectly unmoved; indeed, so rapidly is my toleration increasing, that next year I expect to draw the line on the further side of the peas."

At four o'clock Effie and her husband were to call for her, but when she went down to join them, she found that Edward Carew had come instead of his brother. "Maurice was so busy, that I have brought Edward instead: do you think Mrs. Menteith will mind?"

"Oh no; not at all," said Christine.

At the top of the stairs they were met

by Peter, who exclaimed, "Thank goodness that you've come at last. My mother's got such a crew of old bores in there that I really couldn't stay in the room with them."

They entered, and found a forlorn-looking party of ladies, old and young, sitting in stiff discomfort on the settees that nearly surrounded the walls.

"Mrs. Menteith does not know how to arrange her room," was Effie's mental comment as she and her companions were disposed of on a vacant settee, and felt the same chilly silence creep over them which had already fallen on the earlier arrivals.

"Hudson, bring some tea to Mrs. Carew." Mrs. Menteith thought it vulgar to have a tea-table in the room, and preferred having cups of tepid tea carried about by Hudson.

"Isn't it awful?" whispered Peter to Christine.

"I am afraid," said a young lady at that

moment, rising with the courage of desperation, "that papa will be waiting for his ride if I don't go home."

"And I, too, must run away," said a portly mamma, preparing, now the first move was made, to escape with her three daughters.

"And Charlie is coming up for his exeat, and I am obliged to meet him at Waterloo," remarked another lady. "Goodbye, Mrs. Menteith, and pray remember my Thursdays."

"Are they all going?" thought Effie. But no, a few remained at wider intervals than before.

Effie could stand it no longer. "May I come and sit near that delicious plate of violets, Mrs. Menteith?" she said, moving to a more central spot. "Are they not a very unusual colour?"

One or two of the victims came near to

examine them, and when they were reseated, they found themselves at more practicable distances from one another.

"Now we want a subject," thought Mrs. Carew. "Let us try infection; there is nothing so good."

"Have you heard," she asked, "that Mrs. Lumley's ball has had to be put off, because her second girl has got the scarlet fever?"

"I do not think I know the Lumleys," replied Mrs. Menteith.

"They live in Grosvenor Street," said Effie; "and the eldest daughter has just come out. They were to have given a ball next Monday, and now this has stopped it."

"How very vexatious!" said Mrs. Vanddeur, a well-dressed and pretty, but rather faded woman; "that will shut the poor girl up for the whole year."

"Oh, I dare say in three weeks' time they will be able to move her sister to the sea," remarked Mrs. Langley.

"But I assure you that scarlet fever infection lasts much longer than that; it is not like the measles, you know. A friend of mine——" And then followed a story which lasted at least five minutes, and was then succeeded by another equally long from Mrs. Langley, after which every one grew excited about the respective merits of "Condy" and carbolic acid, and discussed the question with such warm partisanship, that Effie was quite delighted with the success of her manœuvre.

Meanwhile Edward Carew and Christine were carrying on a separate conversation. She was describing to him the Druidical remains and other noteworthy points in the vicinity of Falconbridge, and he was beginning to think they must be so in-

teresting as to be worth a visit—not now, but later in the summer.

"Would you take me to see them, if I came down for a day or two when you are home again?" he asked.

And she replied, with her most winning smile, "How can you ask such a thing! Of course I should be only too delighted."

Peter Menteith was sitting on the music-stool, strumming with his short thick fingers on the cover of the pianoforte, and looking as if something were very much amiss. He had meant Christine to talk to him, and here she was quite absorbed with that miserable curate. What the girls always find in the parsons, he could not imagine, and this one looked an especial fool, he thought. At last he could contain himself no longer. "Miss Ransome," he said, "do come to the window and see this new fern."

Both Christine and Edward were annoyed at this interruption; they had been getting on so very comfortably that neither wished to be disturbed. Edward, indeed, felt he should like to do something—he didn't know exactly what, but something extremely unclerical—to punish the interfering impertinence of the fellow; and Christine, though she could not refuse to move, rose with a tardy compliance that clearly expressed her displeasure.

Arrived at the window, she found no new fern at all. "Why, these were all there weeks ago!" she exclaimed crossly. "What did you call me for?"

"Don't be so hard on one," he said plaintively; and then, seeing her about to move away, he added, with a wish to keep her, "Have you brought the programme of the concert for which you asked us to take tickets?"

"Yes," she answered, less pettishly; "here it is;" and, taking an envelope from her pocket, she gave it to him.

"We will go in for five places," he said, wishing to propitiate her; "will that do?"

"Indeed, it will more than do," she said cordially; "it is most kind and liberal of you."

Poor Peter was always unfortunate. Seeing that her manner was warmer towards him than it had been for some time, he seized the opportunity to make a most injudicious remark. "I say," he suddenly observed, "what was that young parson talking to you about?"

"I should like to know what that is to you!" she retorted haughtily.

"Why haven't you said one word to me since you came in?" he went on, going from bad to worse.

"I suppose it is for me to decide whom

I will talk to!" she replied, all her acerbity returning.

"Christine, do you know you make me very miserable?" said the poor fellow in a shaky voice. "I wish you would give me a right to interfere with whom you speak to."

This was not a happy way of putting the thing, and the young lady walked off with great dignity, after firing a parting shot. "You have no right whatever; and I must beg you will not call me by my Christian name."

"I'd marry Esmé Beech to spite her, only I believe it's just what she'd like best," sighed Peter to himself, as he returned to his music-stool.

It was wonderful, seeing that Christine had by no means decided not to become Mrs. Peter Menteith, how recklessly she behaved towards her admirer. If he had

left her to herself, and not forced his attentions on her, she might have been less repellent to him; but he was so anxiously watchful whenever she spoke to any one else, and so visibly distressed when she neglected him, that she knew to the full, the strength of her hold over him, and was aware that she might safely show all the petulance and ill-humour which were excited in her, by his awkward remarks, his conceited manner, and his exacting jealousy.

When she rejoined the rest, the discussion about the terrors of infection was over; and the coach-party was being talked of.

"How sweet Miss Loder looked!" Mrs. Menteith was observing.

"Yes; I thought her looking especially pretty that day. She is not used to London, and some country breezes freshen up her colour."

"And her little white hat was so particularly becoming. Is she still in mourning for her aunt?"

"Yes. She means to wear it six months. You see, she was more like a mother than anything else to her."

"Ah, to be sure! Mrs. Manton was looking very handsome, too; but what an inappropriate dress she had on!"

"I am not fond of those tight white jerseys, I must confess," said Effie.

"And how she went on with Mr. Escrick! I was quite ashamed of her. Mr. Manton does not mind, so I suppose one has no right to speak; but, really, I was perfectly disgusted. Were not you, Christine?"

"Oh, poor little woman," replied Christine, "I think she meant no harm; it is just her way of amusing herself."

"Always gentle!" exclaimed Mrs. Men-

teith, who for Peter's sake never missed an opportunity of paying a compliment to Christine. "You are a lesson to us, dear. Perhaps I was hard."

Effie was getting dreadfully bored, and a spirit of malice prompted her to torment Mrs. Menteith a little, by appealing to her for her views on a less restricted question.

"I always wonder," she said, "to what extent one is justified in speaking out plainly what one thinks about one's neighbours. You apparently consider it is wrong to say anything against them under any circumstances, Mrs. Menteith?"

"Well, rather, isn't it?" replied Mrs. Menteith. "It is better to say something kind about them, I suppose."

"I am not sure it is not best to give one's real opinion, if one speaks of them at all."

"Perhaps so.

'Truth can be blamed,
But it can't be shamed,'"

replied Mrs. Menteith.

"It seems to me," continued she, "that good people make a mistake when they feel themselves bound to point out all their acquaintance's virtues, and keep silence on their failings. By doing so they forget their share in the formation of the unwritten code, 'Public Opinion;' and if the theory were pushed to an extreme, that great moral force would come to be the expression of the views held by the least worthy portion of the community."

"That is quite true," said Edward; "but you must admit that the habit of fault-finding, just as a pleasant occupation, is a far more common danger, and there is nothing more odious."

"Yes, that is precisely what I think,

Mr. Carew," said Mrs. Menteith, feeling that at any rate it must be safe to side with a clergyman on such a subject.

"I quite agree with you," said Effie; "and after all, seeing the difficulty there is in keeping clear of both extremes in talking of people, I dare say the best thing is to say very little about them."

"But what else is there to talk about, dear Mrs. Carew?" asked Mrs. Menteith. "There are people at all the dinners, and flower-shows, and concerts, which one goes to; one cannot talk of them without talking of the people."

"No, that is true," replied Edward; "and that is one reason why I should like every one to take more interest in general subjects, and less in individual objects."

"Talking of objects," said Mrs. Menteith, "what an object Lady Vancouver had made of herself last week at the bazaar!

How could she put that bright blue on that pale green dress? I may remark this to you, as you think it is right to say what one likes of one's friends."

Effie gave a little impatient tap with her foot, and was preparing to answer; but her brother-in-law launched forth into such an eloquent disquisition on the exact shades of blue and green that suit each other, and showed such a consummate knowledge of the subject, that Mrs. Menteith was delighted with him; and they all discussed what their hostess called "high art" till it was time to go.

After they had deposited Christine in Hertford Street, and were driving homewards, Edward said—

"Effie, why would you persecute that unfortunate woman with your moral speculations on 'too little,' 'too much,' and 'just right' of charity? She must be

lying down at this moment with wet rags on her head, and sal-volatile by her side. It really was too cruel."

"I couldn't help it," replied Effie, laughing. "There is an evil spirit within me that sometimes drives me to propound such questions to people of that sort. I know all the time that they hate me for it, but they do put on such curious faces of puzzledom, that I can't withstand it. Besides, it is a great interest to me to find out what different sorts of views different sets of people hold on the same subject."

"You must have known quite well that Mrs. Menteith would have had no views on those matters. No, it was pure mischief, Effie; you needn't pretend that a love of philosophical research was at the bottom of it."

"Well, anyhow, you amply made up

by your knowledge of serges and twills. Where did you get it?"

"I haven't ministered for five years to the spiritual needs of ladies, old and young, without picking up that sort of thing," said Edward, laughing. "It came to my rescue to-day, for I could not speak in such company of anything about which I felt strongly. It vexes me so to see that look of puzzledom which amuses you, and to hear those *mal à propos* remarks. Really, Effie, I can't get over my astonishment at you. Your sensibilities must be coated with rhinoceros-hide!"

"Or your temper with gold-beater's leaf, my dear Edward!"

"Well, perhaps so; we need not settle which.—It is curious," he went on, after a pause, "that such people should be related to Christine Ransome. I wonder what she feels about their being her belongings?"

"I think she knows what they are; but I am not at all sure that she doesn't mean eventually to marry the son."

"To marry the son! Who? That fellow with the freckles? Impossible, Effie! You are joking!"

"Not at all. It is clear that he is very much taken with her, and I suspect she is trying to make up her mind to him."

"She would never do such a thing; and I can see nothing even on his side. He hardly spoke to her."

"Didn't you see him call her to look at a fern in the window? That was only to get her away from you. I don't think she wanted to go, but she couldn't help it; and then they squabbled for a few minutes, and parted in a huff."

"No, I didn't remark all this. But, Effie, you don't think she cares for him? She can't!"

"No, I am sure she does not. They are always quarrelling, I believe. But, you see, her people are poor, and her mother is very anxious that she should make a good marriage; so she may be persuaded."

"Then you think some one else might satisfy the parents, and possibly herself?"

"I have very little doubt of it. Who is the 'some one else?'—yourself, Edward?"

"Don't tell any one, Effie; but I was wondering if I should have a chance."

"Well," said his sister-in-law, "I think there is the making of a good woman in her, and that you would have a great deal of influence over her. But do set to work at once, and try and make yourself agreeable, or there is no saying what may happen with Peter."

"Do you know at all what—what—if she likes me, I mean, just in a friendly

way ?—that she has no aversion to me, in short ?"

"No; she always speaks of you with great liking; but I am sure she has no idea of what you have told me."

And then they arrived at home, and Effie went upstairs in a meditative mood. How strange that Edward should take a fancy to Christine; and, above all, to Christine when Maude was by! Maude was in so many respects the sort of girl she thought would have attracted him. She could share his interests, and be a real companion to him. But Christine! She was so much more commonplace, and she was so self-conscious and affected, and not a bit more pretty than Maude.

Effie did not make allowance for the charms of Christine's submissive, pleading manner, the timid glances of her lovely fringed eyes, the deference to the person

with whom she was speaking, which was a perpetual unspoken homage.

Maude's was a much simpler nature; she never said a word, or looked a look for effect, and never tried to impress others with her high opinion of them. She was one of those rare persons who have but one manner for home and abroad; one for the empty room and the full one. A man is very safe who chooses such a girl; for such as she is, such she will remain when transplanted to his fireside—when the honeymoon has long waned, and the trousseau is worn out. But it is quite comprehensible that, for the moment, men find more charm in the girls who show a greater desire to please them; whose little airs and graces are assumed with a view to attract attention, and who solicit admiration by their soft smiles, pretty quick glances, and innocent wiles.

## CHAPTER V.

"With what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!"
*Much Ado about Nothing.*

"HADN'T you better run through your songs, Maude?" said Lady Loder the following day, after luncheon. "Lady Eltonreigh is coming, and you will be sure to have to sing."

Maude was feeling listless and gloomy, and a quantity of afternoon visitors, and three long hours of music and small-talk, did not offer a cheering prospect. An hour ago she had felt an almost unconquerable inclination to plead a bad headache, and escape upstairs till dinner-time, but the fresh supply of moral strength, which is

often born of a cutlet and a glass of claret, had come to her aid, and she had resolved to go through with the afternoon's business. The idling of her cousin's parties was enervating when they were looked on as a pleasure; she felt it would be bracing now that it had become a sacrifice. So she fetched her portfolio, and practised her most cheerful and merry songs—the others made her feel too sad—and afterwards sat down and read her book with all the attention she could command.

It was still almost too soon to expect any visitors, and neither Lady Loder nor Christine were in the room when the footman announced "Sir Walter Grenville."

Maude greeted him with evident pleasure. The sight of him carried her back to old days, when all went smoothly with ner, and there were no bothers and worries in her life.

"I've come early," he said, "but I mean to stay late, if you will let me. I was so much obliged to Lady Loder for her invitation. I called a few days ago, but you were all out, and I did not leave a card, as I thought I would come again."

"Have you had any news from Ireland?"

"No; we shall never hear any more of that affair, I suspect. Of course every one in the parish knows who fired the shot, but as usual no one will tell. I've been spending my morning at Veitche's, among the hot-houses. I am afraid I have been very extravagant, but I could not resist buying a quantity of flowers, and sending them down to Shustone."

"But you are not going to the country yet, are you?" she asked. "I thought you were so fond of London that nothing would tempt you away before July."

"Oh dear, no! I have not the slightest

intention of leaving London for a long time yet. All the people I most want to see are here now." He looked closely at her, but she did not appear to have noticed the last remark; and though to Sir Walter it was full of meaning, to her there was no especial signification in it.

"How are all your works getting on at Shustone?"

"I am ashamed to say I hardly know. I was tremendously keen about them at one time, and now I feel as if I didn't care much what was happening to them."

"Surely, that is a pity; it must be so interesting to watch them."

"Do you think so?" he said eagerly. "You like that sort of thing, do you?"

"I think I should if I had it to do," replied Maude; "but Selby has been kept in such perfect order for years, that there is never anything to do but the very smallest, least prepossessing jobs."

"I want to ask you a question," he said, suddenly changing the subject. "Perhaps you will think I have no right to ask it, but I want so much to know. Are you happy here? I have often wondered."

"It is very good of you to think about it," she said shakily, for the troubles she had been going through had told upon her nerves. "Yes, I am quite happy; my cousin is very good to me, and I have everything I can possibly want. And yet," she went on, with an outburst of sadness, "at times I feel so lonely, and as if all I had ever cared for had been lost years ago. I do so long for home."

"Poor little thing!" he said softly, with indescribable tenderness in his eyes; but he spoke so low that Maude, who was trying to repress her tears, did not catch the words. He rose from his chair and walked nervously about the room, and no

one could say what more he might have added, had not Christine tripped lightly into the room, followed by Lady Loder, who welcomed Sir Walter gladly.

"And what have you been doing lately?" she asked.

"I was just telling Miss Loder," answered he, with the unnecessary prevarication suggested by a bad conscience, "I have been revelling in Veitche's hot-houses all the morning, and ruining myself in plants. Yesterday I was down at Kew—I am flower-mad just now, you will say; and last night I went to a party at Mrs. Talmash's."

"Was it pleasant?"

"I found very few friends, but I amused myself by watching the manners and customs of the English in the presence of distinguished foreigners. There was a 'Heathen Chinee' of exalted rank among the guests, and it was very funny to watch

the mixture of awe and curiosity with which he inspired the rest."

"I suppose he could not speak English?"

"Not a word. He was led about by an interpreter, and I stood and listened to the observations made by the victims who were captured and introduced."

"It was quite enough to drive all their wits away."

"Yes, quite; and so apparently it did. The three first asked if he did not find our climate very cold, and the fourth struck out in a new line, and inquired 'What he thought of England?'—a rather comprehensive subject. The two next returned to the low temperature of our country, and after that a lady requested to be told 'Why he wore a yellow coat?' and 'what was Chinese for yellow?'"

"That was quite an original idea," said Lady Loder, laughing.

"But afterwards," continued Sir Walter, "four people in succession asked if he did not find it very cold here, and then I got so nervous that I could not listen any more."

"But what was there to say besides? What remark should you suggest?"

"Shall I make a confession? My host asked me to be introduced, but as no subject occurred to me except the chilliness of an English summer, I begged off and fled."

"That was too bad of you, after being so critical," said Christine; "you should have entertained the Chinaman with half an hour's brilliant conversation."

"And it is horrid of you to have put me out of conceit with that meteorological observation," said Lady Loder. "As you have made your confession, I will make mine: it is the one thing I always say

when I am presented to any Eastern grandee."

"Oh, I shouldn't give it up in your place on any account. I mean to bring it boldly out on the next occasion; only, having just heard it made a dozen times, familiarity had for the moment bred contempt. I would not for any consideration debar myself from any of the well-worn remarks that have been 'tried and found faithful.' One has a whole host of them that come in most serviceably."

"Now be quiet, Sir Walter; I refuse to be put out of conceit with any more of my conversation. I am certain the things you are going to quote are just those I always say."

"Oh no! I am sure you are much more original; but I could not get on without the observations which are the classics of British conversation. For example, if a

young lady tells one she has never been abroad, of course one exclaims, 'How I envy you! What a pleasure in store!' I have always said it, and I mean to go on doing so to the end of the chapter. Why should one try to steal a march on one's neighbours, by saying better things than they?"

Here several sets of visitors came in, and very soon all the chairs in the centre of the room were filled. If Sir Walter had expected to enjoy much of Maude's society, he was disappointed. She moved hither and thither among the guests, and talked with each fresh arrival, about the amateur play which was to be given that evening at the Gaiety, the chances of a thunder-storm, and the comparative claims of tea and iced coffee to being the most refreshing beverage on a hot day. Three such respectable subjects will suffice for an after-

noon party at any time, and Maude was far too preoccupied to care to start anything else. For a while Sir Walter remained in his place, and listened as one lady after another came in, remarking, "We were quite glad to get here without a storm, it looks so heavy;" or, "I suppose you are going to the Gaiety to-night?" But presently he grew tired of his position, and retired to the doorway, where he stood and watched Maude. First he thought she seemed quite happy, and was unreasonably vexed to find her so. Then he thought she looked bored, which pleased him no better. Being bored, like being cross, is inexcusable in a woman, though perfectly natural in the stronger half of creation. Sir Walter's usual genial mood had deserted him; he felt captious and critical. Of one thing, at any rate, he was certain—Miss Loder was the handsomest girl he had seen

since he had been in London, and her voice was softer, and her hands were whiter and more shapely, and her hair of a finer colour than any voice, hands, and hair that he had come across for many a long day. And then her brown eyes with the blue whites! It made you feel queer all over when she turned them upon you; and yet she seemed as unconscious of their effect as if the old nursery saying were true, "It doesn't matter what your eyes look like, as long as you can see well with them." Why, most women, with only half her good looks, would be posing in every imaginable attitude; and though it was amusing enough to see them at their little dodges for attracting admiration, there was something splendid in this girl, who let herself be worshipped, as the half-dozen young men present were worshipping her, and seemed perfectly unaware of the fact all the

while. That girl should be his wife, or no other.

Very tired Maude felt befcre it was all over, and again the temptation arose to plead headache, and remain away from the party to which they were going that evening; but again her flagging spirits revived after dinner, and she made no excuses, but dressed herself with additional care, just because she felt disposed to be satisfied with anything from green baize to brown holland, and came down with a perfect air of cheerfulness about her.

They fought their way up the crowded staircase and entered the room. The first person they saw was Lady Wingfield, who pressed eagerly through the crush and exclaimed, "Oh, Lady Loder, what do you think of this shocking news about Eustace Simmonds?"

"What news?" asked Lady Loder, astonished.

"Edith," whispered Nora Wingfield, who had heard the reports which were current about Miss Loder and Mr. Simmonds, "let us tell her about it and see how she looks.—Isn't it dreadful!" she went on, turning to Maude. "He has gone off, frightfully in debt, with all the money standing in his name for the Maidenhead party!" And she peered curiously in her face.

But Maude's countenance did not alter. Some one had gone off with some money. Some one she knew. Some one called Eustace Simmonds. By-and-by would be the time to take it in; now was the time to talk of it. She must not take it in now.

"Dreadful, if it is true," she said, quite naturally; "but is it really so? Do tell me all about it."

"Oh yes; there is no doubt of it. When the meeting was held, he attended, and

helped to make all the necessary arrangements; but last night he was gone, no one knows where, and had drawn out all the money from the bank."

"Mamma never liked him," chimed in her sister; "she always said there was something queer about him."

"It is a terrible story," said Maude. "I should have thought he was the last person in the world to do such a thing."

"You knew him very well, didn't you?" inquired Edith Wingfield.

"Yes, I thought so; but apparently I did not."

"He is in debt everywhere."

"Is he?"

"And had quarrelled with his father, so that he would give no more help."

"I had heard that they did not get on well together."

"There can't have been anything be-

tween them," said Nora, disappointed, as they turned away. "She never would have taken the news so quietly."

All over the room the same thing was going on. The amateur play, the thunderstorm, both were forgotten, and everywhere was heard, "What a shocking story this is about Eustace Simmonds!" "I always disliked him!" "Wasn't there something very disgraceful at Homburg about cards?" "Had he not a young ward who mysteriously disappeared?" "Was not a relation of his transported for life?"—together with a dozen other possible and impossible tales about his past history and his connections; and all Maude's friends came to talk to her about it, and, according to the custom common among young ladies, to "see how she looked."

Lady Loder thought to herself, "Well, if Maude ever had any *penchant* that way,

she certainly must be cured by this;" and having watched her young charge talking cheerfully, first to one and then to another, and noticing that she never avoided the subject, and always said the right little triviality about it, she decided that Effie had given her a needless fright the day of the coach-party, and that there never had been any danger at all.

But she did not see her young charge after they got home, and she had taken off her gown and wreath and had sat down to think. At first, even then, she hardly realized what had happened; but all in a moment it flashed in upon the very centre of her brain and heart. One after another the most opposite sensations coursed through her mind. Shame for him, shame for herself; anger that he should have so deceived her; intense pity for the man who had brought himself thus to sin and shame; a

trembling horror at the thought of what such a man might have become to her; a passing moment of self-upbraiding, as if it were all her fault, if by her rejection she had driven him to this; an awestruck sense of the nearness of the crime, which she had often read of in newspapers, but had never contemplated as possible among people of her own class;—all these thoughts succeeded one another; and then a sudden chill fear came upon her—he might be caught and tried, and found guilty and sentenced!

And then the sound of those babbling tongues rose in her ears—the gay chatter of a thoughtless crowd to whom the news of a crime is a pleasurable excitement, the ruin of a friend a mere nine days' wonder; and she recollected her own light remarks and callous manner, and cried shame, poor child! on what, in her bitter-

ness, she called her flippancy. And she thought how to-morrow would come, with the same gossip and surmises on the part of those she would meet, and the same outward calmness and levity on her own; and how it would all go on the day after, and the day after, and the day after that; and then his face that she had looked into and trusted came before her, and she leant her head on her hand and sobbed, "Oh, how could you deceive me so! It was cruel, cruel, cruel!" And there she sat, cold and rigid and miserable, till late in the night.

But the aggravations to her sorrow which Maude had expected from external circumstances were spared her. The following day was Sunday, and it rained in such torrents that, except a rush in an ulster to the nearest church, there was no question of going out, and no visitors came

to see them; and Monday's post brought the news of the death of an old Scotch cousin of Lady Loder's.

"So tiresome," said that lady, "that it should happen just now. I haven't seen old Anne McCleane for ten years; but Scotch people are so strict about relationships, they would no doubt be scandalized if I went out before the funeral. I am afraid you will lose two balls and a concert, Maude, for I don't see how she can be buried before Thursday or Friday. Well, it can't be helped."

Poor Maude heaved a sigh of relief, and said, "Don't think of it on my account, Cousin Mary, please. I am quite sure we had better stay in till the funeral is over."

"I am so glad for your sake," said Christine, kindly, when next she was alone with Maude, "that there will be a little quiet this week. You look so tired; a rest

will do you good." It was all she dared say to show her sympathy, for her friend was reserved and shy; but the remark, and the caress which accompanied it, made Maude understand that Christine felt for her.

Later in the day Effie arrived, and on hearing of Miss McCleane's death, begged that, as all going out was suspended, Maude should be allowed to come and pay her long-promised visit; and though no one could precisely recollect when, and by whom, the visit had been promised, there seemed to be a vague idea that it had been talked of. So Maude put together the few things she wanted, and went off to Lower Belgrave Street, feeling that it would be a change and pleasant repose to be with the Carews; and Christine remained to keep Lady Loder company.

Two surprises, one small and one great, fell to Miss Ransome's share that day. The first was the discovery, in her blotting-book, of the concert programme which she thought she had given to Peter; the second was the contents of a note from her mother, which came by the afternoon post, and which were as follows:—

"My darling Christine,

"So, after all, you have got from your fine friends all, and more than all, I asked! I declare the bit of bacon in my mouth half choked me when I saw twenty notes fall out of the envelope at breakfast. And to send them quite anonymous, too! How delicate! You know, my dear, how I always support the aristocracy; they have a tasty way of doing things that other people have not.

"'Daddy,' says I, as soon as I had got

the bacon to go straight, 'here's luck! A hundred pounds, as I live.' So your father was up, and to my side in a minute, and turning over the envelope. 'It's a mistake,' he says; 'I won't have those notes used.' But then I took up the piece of paper they had been wrapped round with, and on it was written, 'From a sincere friend,' and your father he had to give in.

"How glad I was I had refused to pay part of the baker's bill last week, and had bought Bee a new hat for the fête instead; for now I can pay the baker in full, and the other tradesmen besides; and see if I don't take my custom from that impudent fellow, the butcher!

"If you could drop a word of thanks, *genteelly*, Christine, do it, my dear. Of course the gift was from Lady Loder, though the hand was not hers—no doubt

through delicacy. I would write myself, but that I fear it might offend her.

"In haste,

"Your affectionate mother,

ARABELLA RANSOME.

"P.S.—That uppish girl Charlotte, who was maid here, fell down the back stairs before she had been a week at Mrs. Skipton's, and broke her leg. I say it was a judgment on her for the way she behaved to me about the mutton.

"P.S.—I think I shall have a bit of news to tell you soon, but I won't say what, for it often spoils those things."

At first, Christine was intensely puzzled by her mother's communication. As she had never mentioned the straitened circumstances of her family to Lady Loder, it was highly improbable that the packet of notes should have been from her. True,

she might have suspected that such a gift would be welcome, but Christine knew her hostess well enough to be aware that it would never have occurred to her to send it anonymously. She was not in the slightest degree ostentatious, but she never would have thought of making a mystery of her present, had it been from her. On the other hand, who else could have been the donor?

Suddenly a thought struck her which made her cheeks flush crimson. She sprang from her chair, and, in a hurry that was very unlike her usual quiet gliding movements, rushed upstairs two steps at a time. She flung the wardrobe door open, and thrust her hand into the pocket of the gown she had worn the day of Mrs. Menteith's tea. It was empty. She ran to the drawer where she kept her odds and ends, and routed through it,

turning everything topsy-turvy. "Then I did give it him!" she exclaimed, with tears of vexation scalding her eyelids.

It was all too clear now! The envelope which she had bestowed on Mr. Peter Menteith a few days ago had contained, not the programme which she had meant to give him, but her mother's letter; and Peter, glad to lay her under an obligation, had answered Mrs. Ransome's pressing appeal, by forwarding double the sum mentioned in her note.

Grief and shame overpowered her. She knew that if she wrote home and explained her mistake, her mother would flatly refuse to return the money, and would merely congratulate herself on the fact that her daughter had secured an admirer whose devotion could be turned to such profitable account. This was the point of view from which she herself would formerly have

looked at the matter, and she blushed hotly as she remembered it. Truly, Christine had changed much in the last two months.

She was very angry with Peter for reading a letter which was never intended for his eyes, and she felt overwhelmed with confusion as she reflected that, to his unrefined, money-loving mind, it might appear as if she had given him the wrong envelope on purpose. How should she ever be able to face him again?

She writhed under the thought. Was there no way by which she could repay him? She could write to her father; but the money would be paid away by the time her letter reached Falconbridge, and she knew he had no means of finding a hundred pounds at a moment's notice. She would ask Lady Loder for a loan. But when so much had been done for her,

how could she ask for more? She would sell her clothes! But a minute's reflection convinced her of the impracticability of this scheme.

It seemed as if she were no longer mistress of her own actions—as if a hard fate had decided her, and she had only to carry out its dictates, and become Mrs. Peter Menteith. "To be bought, in fact, for a hundred pounds," she said bitterly. But her whole soul rose up at the idea; and the next instant she found herself planning to break with him and his family, and never see them again. This, however, she soon saw would not be very easily done; she could not put an end to the intimacy without assigning any reason, and the true reason she could not give. After much thought, she finally resolved that the most dignified course to pursue would be entirely to ignore what had

passed, in the hope that he would think she had not discovered her mistake, and had not heard of his gift. Yet, knowing him as she did, she had small hope that he would be contented without a recognition of his liberality, and without giving a hint of the feeling which prompted it.

Well, there was no use shrinking at the idea; all she could do would be to look as unconscious as might be when next she met him, to avoid all *tête-à-têtes*, and to suppress any distant allusion he might make to what had happened.

For fear her mother's good resolution of not herself thanking Lady Loder, should evaporate, she took up her pen and wrote—

"DEAR MAMMA,

"If it is Lady Loder who has made you this kind present, I am sure we are all greatly indebted to her; but

I entreat you, as the notes came anonymously, to keep to your determination of not writing to thank her. If she should refer to the subject, I will give her our warmest acknowledgments; otherwise I, too, will be silent, especially as you know they may after all have been sent to you by some of your other friends and relations."

She then went on to comment on Charlotte's misfortune, and to beg for particulars about the piece of news so mysteriously referred to, and which she could only conjecture would turn out to be that of Beatrix's engagement to some one highly approved of by the family.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Some drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentilnesse,
Upon this wrecchede woman lat thou falle."
CHAUCER.

"CHRISTINE," said Lady Loder, when that young lady, having smoothed her ruffled feathers, reappeared in the drawing-room, "I have had a note which makes a little alteration in my plans. Lord Glamorgan wants me to go to him, at Glaston, for Whitsun-week, and act hostess to his party. Maude is asked, but he says he has not room for you, so I am thinking that you may as well go home for ten days, whilst the house is empty. I can't leave you

here all alone, and I should be sorry to miss the party at Glaston."

Christine's face betokened anything but joy.

"You don't look pleased! Shan't you be glad to see your mother?"

"Y-e-s," said Christine, slowly. And then, with a sudden burst, "Oh, how shall I ever be able to bear my life at home again! You don't know what it is, Lady Loder; the noise, and untidiness, and the squabbling, and the children;" and the girl burst into tears.

"There, there, don't, my dear! Please don't make a scene!" ejaculated Lady Loder, fretfully. She was not a discerning woman. Those who lived with her might eat their hearts out with grief, and, so long as they did not cry, or talk of it, she would be none the wiser; but any outward show of feeling disturbed her

equanimity, and vexed her. "After all, it is your home, and I am afraid I have done wrong in taking you out of it. But, really, you need not distress yourself; a pretty girl like you can have no difficulty in finding another one. There, there!"

At this judicious sop to her vanity, Christine showed signs of returning calm.

"You shan't stay long, if you are so anxious about it—only the inside of the week; you can come back on the Saturday if you like. Now write and tell your mother to expect you, and say I shall pay your journey in order to make it all easy."

So the letter to Mrs. Ransome was re-opened, and a postscript added, with the announcement of her impending visit.

She had hardly resealed it, when a note was brought up from Mrs. Menteith, saying that she had called to see whether her darling Christine would like to accompany

her to the flower-show at the Botanical Gardens. There was surely no reason, because Lady Loder had lost a relation whom she had never seen, that she should mope, etc., etc.

So Christine, having previously peeped out of the window, and ascertained that there was no one in the carriage besides her cousin Augusta, sent down a message to say that she should be very glad to go.

On the road to the Regent's Park, Christine happened to mention that she was returning home for Whitsun-week, and Mrs. Menteith at once burst into a storm of protestations.

"Such a thing cannot be thought of, dearest, dearest Christine. Why go all that way when you have loving friends in London? Of course you will come to us in Southbourne Terrace. It will be

delightful. Naughty, naughty girl for not having proposed it! How fortunate that our visit to dear Lady Sandown has fallen through!"

Christine began to think that, after all, perhaps it would be best to accept her cousin's invitation, when they reached the entrance to the Gardens, and, to her great displeasure, who should be seen standing there but Peter, in charge of an aunt of his whom she had met several times at his mother's parties. Mrs. Turner immediately appropriated Mrs. Menteith, and Peter showed every disposition to do the same by Christine.

"I didn't expect to see you here," she remarked ungraciously.

"Ah, duty compelled me to escort my aunt Isabella from her house," he replied, with a little laugh; "and besides," he added, in an undertone, "I wasn't sure

you'd have come if you had seen me in the carriage. Would you, now?"

"Very possibly not," retorted his companion.

"Peter dear," remarked his mother, "Christine has half promised to come and spend a week with us at Whitsuntide; you must use your influence to decide her."

"No, have you? How awfully good of you!" he exclaimed, his light-grey eyes absolutely beaming with gladness. "I sometimes think you are more down on one than you really mean."

Unfortunate Peter! Can nothing teach him discretion?

"Oh, you think that, do you?" replied Christine. "Now, so far as you ground your opinion on this visit that your mother talks of, you are quite mistaken. I have already written home to tell them to expect me, so you see it is out of the question that I should come and stay with you."

Poor Peter turned pale, freckles and all. "I can't think how I always manage to blunder on something that makes you angry," he said ruefully. "I didn't mean anything. You can easily write to Mrs. Ransome and say you are coming to us, and you know what pleasure you would be giving. I would do anything to please you, Christine. And I *have* done whatever I could guess—could discover—I mean, whatever it seemed to me would be acceptable to you."

Christine was aware of what his allusion was intended to convey, and hardened her heart.

"I don't know what you call doing what you think would be acceptable to me," she said. "I wonder how often I have begged you not to talk of yourself or of me; and I should like to know when you speak of anything else."

"But just promise me this one thing. You know how glad we should be of your visit; and I should fancy your people at home—just now, perhaps——" He stopped, stammering.

"You think my people don't want me?" she said haughtily. "You are mistaken, as usual. They want me particularly, as I shall be able to tell you if I see you when I return from Falconbridge."

"I wish you weren't so pretty and charming, with all your whims," he said sadly. "I wish you had small screwed-up eyes, and a niggery mouth, like Maggie Wetherby."

"Thank you," replied Christine, slightly mollified, however.

"If you were only a little kind to a fellow, you're just the sort of girl one would let trample on one, or anything else."

"What an inducement to be 'a little kind'!" retorted Christine, sarcastically. "How pleasant it would be for me!"

"Do you always snub people as you snub me?" he asked piteously.

"I don't 'snub' any one," she replied; "but of course one is different to different people."

If Peter had known his real interests he would have taken much less pains to ingratiate himself with his "lady fair." Had she seen him devoting himself to some one else, as likely as not she would have held out a flag of truce, and come to terms; but as it was he let her feel how entirely his happiness was in her hands: in his efforts to please her he made one awkward remark after another which excited her displeasure, and then he cowered and writhed under her tart replies.

Another person who was a good deal

perturbed by the news of Miss Ransome's intended retirement to the country during the "recess," was Edward Carew. He heard it in Hertford Street, and received it in blank amazement. Not that a week's absence was any such great matter after all, for his vicarage would not be ready to receive him for some time, and he would doubtless have many opportunities of meeting her after her return; but he could not shake off an impression that something might have occurred to make a permanent parting between Lady Loder and her young friend, in which case he ran the risk of seeing that fair face with the smiles and dimples no more.

His first move was to call a hansom, and drive straight to Effie's, where he told her of his forebodings, and consulted her anxiously as to whether it would or would not be advisable to make the most of the

shining hour, and propose to her before she left; but this Mrs. Carew strenuously opposed.

"You really must not be in such a hurry," she said; "I don't believe she suspects what you are thinking of. I never saw any one who was such a bad hand at making love as you. Why don't you pay her a little more attention? Peter Menteith will carry her off after all, if you go on like this." At which heartless taunt Edward looked so woe-begone that she repented, and added, "I can't believe she will give in to that; but still, do bestir yourself if you wish to make all sure."

As a result of this conversation, Edward called again in Hertford Street later in the week, and finding Lady Loder out, made an excuse, and went upstairs, where he spent a blissful hour talking to Christine, who, in a confiding mood, poured the tale

of her hopes, and fears, and anxieties, and difficulties into his sympathetic ear. "You have all spoilt me here, I am afraid," she said, looking touchingly beautiful as she sat on the sofa, with a tear quivering on her long eyelashes. Of course he assured her how much he felt for her, and she listened to his remarks with repressed emotion; of course he gave her a little good advice about the right use of trials—how could a young clergyman do otherwise?—and she received his admonition as if it had been an inspiration straight from heaven. "I have had nobody to tell me these things," she murmured. Who could have believed that this gentle, tender, submissive creature could be the same being who administered slaps to Hester at home, and snubs to Peter in London?

Before going away he learnt that Miss McCleane's funeral would be over on

Friday, and that Christine was going with Lady Loder to Lady Emily Beavan's dance.

How he wished that he had no conscientious scruples against ball-going for clergymen (conscientious scruples against anything but bazaars are certainly most inconvenient things); he would have asked for a card, and have met her there. However, at any rate he could send her a bouquet—which he did; and when on Saturday morning Effie benevolently asked him to take a note for her to her aunt's, Miss Ransome thanked him for his present with a downcast glance that made his heart beat. He further discovered that she had taken his bouquet to the ball in preference to a magnificent one, from the hot-houses at Wollaston, which had been sent her by Peter, and which now stood as public property, in a glass on the drawing-room table.

"Let me make you a stephanotis button-hole," she said, ruthlessly extracting a blossom here, and a spray of fern there; and when Edward replied, "Thank you; but is it not a pity to spoil the flowers?" she answered, "Oh no, not in the least," and, he thought, purposely made havoc among them.

He stayed as long as he could with any propriety after Lady Loder had given him her note, and then took it back to Lower Belgrave Street, feeling light at heart; whilst Christine read the newspaper upside down, and thought over and over a new idea which had just dawned upon her mind.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Come back, come back! Yea, back indeed do go
Sighs panting thick, and tears that want to flow;
Fond fluttering hopes upraise their useless wings,
And wishes idly struggle in the strings."

CLOUGH.

PERHAPS it was the new vision of a possible happiness which had floated before the imagination of Miss Ransome, that made it so bitterly distasteful to her to step, on the following Monday morning, into the cab which was to carry her off to King's Cross.

She could not repress a remorseful feeling at her unwillingness to return to her own home and relations, but still less could she persuade herself that the prospect of being again with them was a

pleasant one. If there had been enough to bear when long custom had blunted her to the habits and manners of her family, what would she not suffer, now that custom had ranged itself on the other side, and she was used to the regularity and comforts of Lady Loder's well-ordered household?

And she would have to remain at Falconbridge for six days—a hundred and forty-four hours, how many minutes? But here, happily, Christine's mental arithmetic failed her. At any rate, she would go back by the first train on the Saturday; there could be no harm in that, and it would cut off half a day at least. Her mournful meditations completely occupied her; she never noticed her fellow-travellers; she never looked out of the window at the meadows, and woods, and flowery hedgerows.

At last, after a journey of several hours, the engine once more slackened speed, and they drew up at the well-known platform.

There stood her mother, literally shining with excitement, and exclaiming loudly, as each carriage crawled slowly by, "I do believe she isn't come, after all!"

Beatrix was not with her; but Lotty and Florence were, and so was Sophy, and so was Hester. "Sophy's ears stick out more than ever," was Christine's first thought; "and how red they are!"

The four girls stood side by side, looking very hot and very dumpy; and, oh horror! each had got a resplendent new locket, of a kind on which Christine had sometimes cast a pitying glance in the toy-shops in Sloane Street. A huge gold oval lay on each blue serge bosom, and on it rose in massive silver letters, the vowels O. U., crossed by a large spoon.

She had not suppressed the feeling of disgust with which the sight had filled her, when her mother espied her, and with a loud cry of joy rushed to the carriage door. "Here she is, dear child. Oh dear! how glad I am to see you! Kiss your sister, children;" and the four girls, who had suddenly become very shy, left off twirling the fingertips of their thread gloves, and presented four hard red cheeks to be kissed.

Mrs. Ransome rummaged about among the luggage for Christine's box. "The 'bus is so dear," she said; "I have told Ned to step up with the barrow. You won't mind walking? Bee sends her love; she was afraid of the hot sun; she tans so, you know. But my! Christine, what a sweet dress! though, to be sure, you would put on your best to travel in. And, my dear, I hope you are pleased to

see us again, and that you haven't grown too fine since you have been away." And so Mrs. Ransome rattled on, as she walked beside her daughter down the glaring white road which led from the station to Alexandra Villa.

At the door they were met by Beatrix, who at any rate was a relief to the eye. Even Christine, who was in no admiring mood, could not help being struck with the prettiness of her face and figure, though she seemed to have acquired a sort of supercilious beauty-manner which her sister did not recollect in her. "How are you, Christine?" she said, rather distantly. "I'm very pleased to see you. I would have gone to meet you if there had not been such a hot sun. Come in and have some tea; it is quite ready."

"There, child," cried her mother, throwing open the door of the dining-room,

which was the apartment they generally sat in when they had no visitors, "we've furbished up the room a bit for you, so that you shouldn't find things different here to what you're accustomed to. You see, that packet of notes——"

But this allusion to a very disagreeable subject opened Christine's lips. "Well, mamma, you have made it smart!"—a questionable compliment that amply satisfied Mrs. Ransome, and set her off again.

"I flatter myself this is done quite in style," said she, proudly surveying the white walls spotted with gold fleurs-de-lis, the muslin curtains tied back with pink tarlatan, and the green carpet strewn with roses and ferns. "It is tapestry Brussels," she remarked, "but it looks every bit as good as real; and being a last year's pattern, I got it at a reduction."

"You always were a very clever hand at bargains, mamma," said Christine, perceiving that she was expected to make some remark.

"And see what the girls have done at the School of Art," pursued the happy mother, wheeling round, and standing in a contemplative attitude to survey the pictorial possessions of the family. Exactly opposite to the light, hung the old picture of the burning ship. It had been lately revarnished, so that the flames glared with redoubled fierceness, out of a more than ever indistinguishable background. On one side was a water-colour representation of some ragged and afflicted-looking, ox-eyed daisies in a blue pot, which testified to the talents of Florence; on the other, one of a forlorn and dejected stork, gazing at a water-lily, which bore witness to the genius of Lotty. "The master says

Florence may come to exhibit in London, some day," observed Mrs. Ransome.

Happily, just at that moment Mr. Ransome came in, and Christine was not obliged to answer. He greeted his daughter with genuine pleasure, saying, "I have felt quite lost without you, Chrissy. Now that I have got you back, I am not sure I shall be able to make up my mind to any more partings." When tea was over he carried her off for a quiet chat, and they sauntered about together under the small young trees in the stuffy little garden.

"High tea at seven," shouted Mrs. Ransome after them; "and we are going to dress, because we have company."

"Who is coming, papa?" inquired Christine.

"Well," said her father, with some hesitation, "it's some one whom I'm half afraid you won't care to meet, but who is here

a great deal now—Albert Palmer. Your mother insisted on asking him to-night."

Albert Palmer! This, then, was the explanation of the mysterious hints in the maternal letters about Beatrix's hands, and Beatrix's hats, and the successes "some one" was having at Falconbridge.

"Is he engaged to Bee?" she asked, in a rather disgusted tone of voice.

"No, not engaged; but your mother thinks he is very likely to ask her."

"Oh, father!" cried Christine, suddenly turning scarlet, "do you think Bee has told him about that letter;—you know—the letter I wrote the morning Lady Loder's note came?"

"Surely not," replied Mr. Ransome; "she would never do such a thing."

But Christine felt less certain, and the thought that this episode in her existence, which she would have fain hidden even

from her own recollection, had been divulged, and joked about by her sister and the person from whom of all others she would most have wished to conceal it, rankled in her mind. However, she said nothing, and merely asked, "Does Bee like him?"

"Oh yes, I fancy so. And, of course, as your mother says, it would be a good thing to have her well settled. Still, Chrissy, though it may be prejudice, I can't bear the young man. He has patronizing, stuck-up manners and genteel airs that I can't endure. His old father, Stephen Palmer, who measured calico and flannel, and handed them across his own counter, and was not ashamed of standing there, was twice as much a gentleman."

At half-past six Christine went in to unpack her box, but she found that her sisters had been beforehand with her.

They had purloined her key, and had taken out her things; they had tried them all on in turn, and had then strewn them about, on chairs, bed, and the floor.

With difficulty she restrained her temper, and reduced the room to something like order, and then began to dress, among a shower of questions from Beatrix, as to her parties, balls, and admirers; but on this last subject Christine was very reticent, or, as her sister expressed it, "very cross." If Bee had been less pressing she might have told her about Mr. Peter Menteith's attentions, though on that new possibility which had come into her mind, she would still have been wholly silent; but Beatrix was so inquisitive, and, as Christine thought, "so vulgar," that she declined to answer any questions at all.

The second Miss Ransome then began to talk about her own affairs. She had

been amusing herself very well lately. One of the committee of the New Lawn Tennis Club had invited her to become a member, and, indeed, would take no refusal. There had been a difficulty about the subscription, and he had at once paid the guinea for her, and for her mother; only that must not be let out, or papa might object.

Christine knew she ought to make some inquiries about the pressing committee-man, but she was tired and low, and indisposed to do her duty. "I didn't know you could play," was all she said.

At last the cameo brooch was adjusted to Beatrix's satisfaction, and the two sisters prepared to descend the stairs, each with an uncomfortable feeling towards the other in her heart. Bee was doubtful whether Mr. Palmer's allegiance might not be shaken by the reappearance of his

former love; Christine was wondering how much he knew of the letter that she had rescued at such pains from the post; and, further, she was cogitating what effect such a connection as Mr. Palmer would have on her possible future relations to Edward Carew.

The guest was already there, dressed in a velvet suit, and with his hair, Christine thought, more obnoxiously plastered down than of yore, in two loops on his forehead.

"How do you do, Miss Christine?" he said, rising to meet her. "So you have come down to regain your roses in the country?" This with a free-and-easy stare. "Why, you *have* grown pale!—How are you, Miss Beatrix? Where will you sit? Here, pray take my chair."

Christine's lip curled. Three months ago she, too, would have thought it good manners to offer her chair to each fresh

arrival; but now, under Lady Loder s tuition, she had ceased to do so, and, like all converts, looked with withering scorn and dislike on her former fellow-transgressors.

Bee responded, "Oh no! why should I take yours?" but ended by sitting down in it, with a giggle. And Mrs. Ransome peeped triumphantly at her eldest daughter out of the corners of her eyes, to see if she noticed the attention.

Presently tea was announced by Janet, Charlotte's successor, and the party adjourned to the dining-room to refresh themselves with tea-cake and bread-and-butter, and trifle; with beefsteak and sherry for the gentlemen.

"Has Miss Beatrix told you of our lawn tennis club?" asked Mr. Palmer.

"Yes. How many members have you?"

"Only thirty as yet," replied Mr. Palmer. "We admit by ballot, and black-ball mercilessly. In London, of course, society is a good deal mixed; but here we wish to be very exclusive. The subscription is a guinea, and that in itself will go far to keeping it select."

"Very far, indeed," said Christine, with severe politeness. "And who are the thirty fortunate members?"

"Oh, we have the lord-lieutenant's name, and his lordship's promise that he and Lady Damer will come to one of our gatherings; and Lady Esther Hanway; the vicar and his wife; several of the county families—I used my influence with them; my fair friend here" (waving his hand graciously towards Beatrix); "and a few, very few, of the more acceptable among the townspeople."

"Lady Esther couldn't go to the opening

meeting," said Mrs. Ransome, "because the railway company had charged half a crown for bringing her new bonnet from London, and she refused to pay more than eighteen-pence, so they would not deliver it. Dear, dear! what is the use of being a 'lady' if one has to count the pence like that?"

"Better by far not be a 'lady,' and have a little more of the ready, I think," said Mr. Palmer, pompously. "If I had a wife, I should be sorry enough to see her bonnet go off in the company's van, for the sake of a paltry shilling."

"Well, Mr. Palmer, it isn't likely that you would need to see that," replied Mrs. Ransome. And Bee giggled.

"Do you think there will be a dissolution this autumn, Palmer?" asked Mr. Ransome, to whom this kind of gossip was especially distasteful.

"Very likely," he answered. "I did

think at one time of offering myself as member for Falconbridge, but every one says that these are not the days for a gentleman to enter Parliament; the amount that has to be gone through with a constituency must be more than could be endured by a person with any delicacy of feeling."

"And yet to have 'M.P.' after one's name, and spend the season in London, must be worth a good deal," put in Beatrix.

"I could spend the season in London, if I liked, without going into Parliament, Miss Beatrix. But the fact is, London doesn't suit my health. Unless one goes into society it is no pleasure, and the late hours and bad atmosphere of fashionable assemblies, are very prejudicial. Dinner at eight——"

"Why, that is supper!" exclaimed Mrs. Ransome.

"Then an at-home, then a ball,—one can't stand it. And see how it takes the roses out of the young ladies' cheeks!—You have been out a great deal, I presume, Miss Christine?"

Bee was quite at her ease as to the steadfastness of her admirer; his every look at her sister was intended to convey, "You poor thing! how you have gone off!"

Christine was a little hurt, and very angry. However, it would be highly *infra dig.* to show her wrath, so she only responded gently—

"Yes; we went out nearly every night."

"Do take some more butter, Mr. Palmer," interrupted Mrs. Ransome; "not, I dare say, that this fresh Alderney butter is as great a treat to you as it is to us; still, you will agree, I am sure, that it is very good. Janet's brother is at a farm where they keep Alderneys, and we get some

twice a week from there; and only sixteen pence a pound, too, which is cheap nowadays."

"It is beautiful butter," responded Mr. Palmer. "Miss Beatrix, share my pat."

"Mamma," said Sophy, solemnly and rather irrelevantly, "Janet's young man has sent her a ring. I saw it."

"No! you don't mean it? After all I said to her! 'Janet,' I said, 'if you go and get married, after I have been at the pains of teaching you the cooking, it's downright ingratitude,' I said; and she promised to send him about his business, and cried and all! Really, young people's promises——"

But the attention of the juniors had already strayed from the maternal lamentation. Mr. Palmer was engaged in inducing Bee to pull a cracker with him; and Bee was declaring that "those things were full of gunpowder, and she shouldn't

dare, for the life of her." However, at last she allowed herself to be persuaded. Then they snatched the motto from one another, Bee coming off victorious; and then, when she had looked at it, she thrust it into her pocket, and asserted, with redoubled giggles, that she "couldn't read such a thing, if it was ever so."

At last her admirer grew tired of entreating for a sight of the motto; so Beatrix relented, and then the cause of so much bashful modesty turned out to be only this—

"The sight of thy smile is like light to my eyes,
Thine orbs like forget-me-nots dropped from the skies."

Lotty and Florence, having reached an age when "love's young dream" becomes deeply interesting, sat side by side listening intently, and kicking each other under the table when anything especially marked

was said. Sophy and Hester were stolid; Mr. Ransome looked vexed, Mrs. Ransome delighted; Christine was in agonies. And this was Monday, and the same thing would be repeated on Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday, and Friday. And July was only two months off, and then she should be obliged to come down, and stay for ever and ever!

After tea they returned to the drawing-room, but things did not improve. Beatrix sang, and Mr. Albert Palmer leant over the back of her chair, throwing in neat and appropriate comments on the words of her songs; and when the music was over, there was more conversation, in the midst of which Mr. Palmer, seeing that Bee had taken up the kitten, and was petting and kissing it, remarked "how much he wished he was that kitten!"

Christine could not help wondering

what would happen to Maude if fate transplanted her into such surroundings; and with the impetuosity of youth, and its ignorance of the vigour of the human constitution, she mentally ejaculated, "She would simply die!"

But—

> "Be the day weary and be the day long,
> At length it ringeth to evensong;"

or, in other words, a tea-party, however hateful it may be, comes to an end at last.

Mr. Palmer got up, and, after much dawdling, finally said good-bye, and took his departure; and the Ransome family prepared to go upstairs to bed—Mrs. Ransome putting her fat arm round the waist of her eldest daughter, and whispering confidentially in her ear as they laboured up the steep and narrow flight—

"Well, Chrissy, don't you think I shall get one of my girls off this year?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

"C'est une grande misère que de n'avoir pas assez d'esprit pour bien parler, in assez de jugement pour se taire. Violà le principe de toute impertinence."—LA BRUYÈRE.

CHRISTINE felt much less miserable next morning, when the realities of life were uppermost. She helped her mother in the kitchen; she mended the old dining-room drugget, which was migrating to Mrs. Ransome's bedroom, on the first of that series of heavenward ascents, that mark the declining years of a carpet; and then, after exhibiting such of her toilettes as she had brought from London, she sat down before a pile of lace and ribbon, to convert it into fichus and frills, after the similitude

of her own. Her sisters sat with her, telling her small bits of local gossip, and listening with flattering attention to any anecdotes of her town life that she would vouchsafe to them.

In the afternoon she had a walk with her father, and was pleased to find what happiness her return caused him. He opened out to her, and told her details of his business that he never mentioned at home. It seemed that things were improving, so that the pressure for money, which had been on them for several years, was likely to decrease; and, hearing this, she confided to him her troubles about Peter Menteith's attentions, and the unfortunate mistake which had laid her under pecuniary obligations to him, and Mr. Ransome promised by degrees to put by the necessary sum, and to return it to the donor as soon as he possibly could.

"I should be distressed beyond measure," he said, "if anything of the kind should influence you into marrying a man you don't care for. As your mother isn't here, I don't mind saying so: you know, she always laughs at me for what she calls my sentimental notions."

And Christine felt a new warmth in her heart for her kind little father, and recognized that, if the worst came to the worst, she would find an ally in him.

Wednesday was the day of the weekly tennis meeting, and Mr. Palmer came early to escort his friends to the ground. Mrs. Ransome's joyous excitement was almost uncontrollable. She was a woman of jovial temperament, who, under any but the most depressing circumstances, thoroughly enjoyed life; and the prospect of an afternoon spent among the envied few of Falconbridge, within sight of

several "county families," and with *carte blanche* to eat and drink unlimited ices, cakes, and tea, all at her companion's expense, had raised her spirits to bursting pitch. Besides, it was no mean glory to be the chaperon of a daughter who was an object of attention to the most eligible young man in the Falconbridge set.

"Go on, Bee," she said in a loud whisper, as they started. "Christine and I are going to walk together."

The ground certainly was a lovely spot, and as Christine entered its sacred precincts, she felt more cheerful than she had expected. The day was gorgeous. The field was on a slight height, and from it could be seen range after range of hills, which rose one behind another in the distance, till the last became a mere shadowy line; whilst in the foreground long columns of smoke, scarcely less blue

than the hills, sprang out of a number of charcoal-burners' heaps, and stood erect in the air, hardly bent aside at the top by the light breeze. The trees made a pleasant rustle, the shadows flickered on the grass, and the scene was redeemed in Miss Ransome's eyes from too much stillness, by the groups of gaily dressed girls, who, with their attendant swains, were walking about on the paths.

"There is Lady Esther Hanway," whispered Mrs. Ransome, to whom hills and dales were matters of entire indifference; "and I declare, she has got the new bonnet on! I wonder if she paid the shilling after all, or if the company gave way? And my! Christine; isn't that Lord Damer and his lady? I must make an opportunity of speaking to them, after dining there, and all. And oh! Beatrix—— Why, where's Bee? Ah!

well!"—with a knowing smile, as she turned round and found her younger daughter had vanished.

Christine could not help wishing that her mother did not speak so very loud. She thought, too, that she noticed a disposition on the part of the company to move away as they approached; and certainly, as she looked at Mrs. Ransome, whose voluminous person was compressed into the tightest possible violet silk, she could not feel much surprised.

"How do you do, my dear?" It was Lady Esther Hanway who was speaking. "How do you do, Mrs. Ransome? May your daughter give me an arm as far as that bench in the shade?" And the pair walked off together, leaving Mrs. Ransome to her own reflections.

"When did you come down?" inquired Lady Esther.

"On Monday; and I am going back on Saturday morning."

"And have you enjoyed yourself in London?"

"Yes, very much indeed. Lady Loder has been most kind; and I have been out and danced more than I ever even dreamt of."

"Ah! I dare say. Still, London is not what it was in my time; society is too large now. How far pleasanter it was when I was a girl, and we used to go to Almack's! Ah! many is the time I have sat on those blue sofas;" and the old lady branched off into reminiscences of her youth. After a while she returned to the present. "Do you see much of Mrs. Carew?" she inquired. "Dear me! it must be twenty years ago, or more, when she was a little thing toddling about in white frocks. How time goes! I hear

my nephew, Lord Gresham, has just given his living to her brother Edward."

"Her brother-in-law," corrected Christine.

"To be sure—to be sure," said Lady Esther. "How my memory is going! I suppose you don't know him?"

"Yes, I do," said Christine. "He has been staying with his brother whilst the repairs at the rectory are being carried out. He is very nice."

"Well, he ought to be; he is a lucky man. That living is worth twelve hundred a year; one of the best in England; and there is a capital house. It used always to be kept for a younger son in our family—quite a provision, you know. But Charles Hanway has no turn for the Church; and in these days there is such nonsense talked about vocations! so it was going begging. And you really think Gresham will find him an acquisition?"

"Very much so, I should think. He is—oh, very nice," said Christine, taking refuge with the incomparable monosyllable. There are few people who analyze character, and can give any reason for their likings (reasons for their dislikes are far more easily forthcoming), and Christine was not one of these.

"Married, I suppose?" said Lady Esther.

"No, he is unmarried," replied Christine.

"Oh, I dare say a young lady will be found quick enough. He has probably been engaged these five years; curates always are, and a good thing too. An unmarried clergyman is no use at all."

Edward Carew engaged for five years! The phrase shot with an unpleasant dart through Christine's ears. Not that it was in the least more likely because Lady Esther had suggested it; but it might be.

Curates are generally engaged, and only waiting for a living, to blossom into matrimony. To do Christine justice, the twelve hundred a year, and the "capital house," did not once come into her mind; nor, as a reverse side of the picture, Alexandra Villa, with the ferns and gold spots; but an image rose before her of Lady Loder's drawing-room, where she and Mr. Carew had sat and talked, on the day of their final interview. She remembered the interest in her, which she had seen in his looks, and heard in his voice, and all of a sudden her heart spoke, and said, "He has not been engaged for five years; he is not engaged at all."

"What is the matter, child? What are you staring at?" said Lady Esther after some minutes had elapsed, and Christine still remained silent, absorbed in her reverie.

"Nothing," she replied with a start,

once more awaking to the scene around her.

"Then let us go to the tent, and have a cup of tea."

Presently they came upon Lady Damer, who was laughing heartily. "Oh, Lady Esther! do tell me. Who is that fat woman in violet, who has completely taken possession of my husband? She says she dined with us last winter, and she has carried Damer off to get her an ice."

Lady Esther whispered something, and they moved on, but soon it became painfully apparent that Mrs. Ransome was attracting a great deal of attention. Lord Damer had asked after her daughter, and Mrs. Ransome was bent on capturing Bee in order to introduce her; but Bee was at the opposite end of the tent, and it took no small amount of signalling and beckoning to bring her to her mother's side.

"It was his lordship's wish," she said proudly, when afterwards recounting the incident in family conclave. "He inquired if my pretty daughter was there; and though I knew he meant you, Christine, I thought that, as you had had so much done for you already, I would take the remark for Bee, so I said, 'She's somewhere about, my lord, but she's such a general favourite, that I don't see much of her when we're out together, though I say it that shouldn't.' But just then Bee came in sight, so I hailed her, and presented her to his lordship; and he remarked they were going to have a ball at the Castle in the winter, and he hoped she liked dancing, and would come to it. Now, don't say your mother does nothing for you girls!"

As the ground filled, more friends came in, and Christine was soon surrounded

with old acquaintances and new ones; for, without doubt, she was far the prettiest and best-dressed girl present, and every one wanted to talk to her. On the whole, she spent a very pleasant afternoon; and, as they walked home, Mrs. Ransome said—

"Well, Christine, I do think, when I see you among other girls, that you have gained style in London. You certainly were quite among the county family set, my dear, to-day."

But the afternoon's enjoyment was dearly paid for by the suffering of the evening. Mr. Palmer returned home with them, and oh! the gossip that ensued. From seven till ten they discussed the tennis-party, and the subjects that grew out of it. They pitied one girl for having "so sadly gone off lately;" they laughed at another for making such a "gig" of herself; they asserted that a third was

trying to "catch" somebody, and jeered at her infinitesimal chance of success. Then they reviewed the prices of everything, from the lace on Lady Damer's parasol, to the cost per quart of the ices.

Tea made a break, but when it was over the conversation returned to the original subject; the exclusiveness of the society was a great cause for thankfulness, the absence of the absent being even more gratifying than the presence of the present. From the Falconbridge society the transition to that of royalty, was, of course, but a step; and Mr. Palmer grew very anecdotive about "the Wales'," as he called them, and he told so many stories of their home life, that it was difficult to believe he had not been personally intimate with them. Finally, he grew equally diffuse on the subject of the ladies, whom he denominated "the P.B.'s;" and, dis-

covering an imaginary likeness between Beatrice and Mrs. Langtry, declared facetiously that henceforth he should never call her anything but the "Lily of Falconbridge."

"Christine," said Sophy next morning, with her usual solemnity, as she and Hester and their eldest sister were sitting together in the dining-room after breakfast—"Christine, when I am grown up, I mean to be like you, not like Beatrix."

Christine put her arm round Sophy's thick waist, and gave her a kiss. This sisterly caress was partly in recognition of the compliment implied in the child's remark, partly because the young beauty was touched at the simplicity with which the little girl was choosing her style of future good looks; whereas she could never by any possibility be anything but a common, dumpy young woman, with round

red cheeks, a snub nose, and prominent ears.

"Why, dear?" she asked.

"I think Beatrix is vulgar; don't you? I should not like to be vulgar."

"I must own," replied Christine, "that I would rather she did not giggle and talk as she did last night."

"I am glad," resumed Sophy, "that you refused Albert Palmer after all, especially as he never cared for you a bit."

"How do you know that?" inquired the elder sister, blushing angrily. Much as she despised Mr. Palmer, it was far from agreeable to be told he had "never cared for her a bit."

"He said so himself—I heard him," observed Sophy, triumphantly.

"You heard him? What do you mean?" asked Christine.

"Yes, I did. It was about a fortnight

ago. Bee found the first letter you had written to him, the day Lady Loder's invitation came; it was in the blotting-book, and she showed it him next time he called, and they had fine fun over it together."

Sophy did not notice that Christine had bitten her lips till the blood came, and went on placidly—

"And he said the letter was directed to him, so it was his; and he should take it away, and frame it with the one he received from you, as a specimen of what young ladies were. And then he said he had had an escape, for he had never wanted to marry you; only you took him into the summer-house, and made him offer to you."

"He said that, did he? How dared he tell such a lie!" exclaimed Christine, losing all self-control. "And you could sit here

and hear him slander me in such a manner! And Beatrix allowed it too! I am ashamed of you, Sophy! You talk of not being vulgar! You are vulgar to the backbone, and will be so all your life," she added, in her anger striving to say what she knew would be most cutting to her sister; and Sophy burst into a roar, in which she was joined by Hester, who screamed from sympathy, in a higher key.

"What is the matter?" asked Beatrix, putting her head through the door.

"A nice set of relations I have," said Christine, with withering sarcasm. "No sooner is my back turned, than they set to work, with their low friends, to make game of me, and to libel me. Nice sisterly behaviour, I call it."

"Hoity-toity!" responded Beatrix. "Her highness is put out, it appears."

"It is all because Albert Palmer doesn't like her," sobbed Hester.

"Be quiet, child!—or there! take something to cry for," cried Christine, giving a shake and a cuff to Hester, who redoubled her howls.

"You really should try and overcome your jealous temper," remarked Beatrix, with provoking calm. "You should not expect everybody to prefer you, and then you would not be disappointed. I dare say you will marry well, after all."

"Marry well!" cried Christine. "Do you think I would marry that snobbish shopkeeper, with his paltry three thousand a year? I could do five times as well as that, if I would, at this moment. Let me pass, Beatrix; I am going upstairs."

"By all means," returned her sister, moving aside. "Shall we send you up your lunch; perhaps you may not feel equal to coming down?" and with this parting fling she returned to her occupations.

This altercation did not make the last days of Christine's visit to Falconbridge more pleasant. She remained on distant terms with her offending sisters; she froze her mother with chilly politeness, when she injudiciously attempted to restore peace, by pointing out that "it was only just and right that Beatrix should have one lover, when she herself had the chance of so many in London;" and she even went so far, on the Friday afternoon, when Mrs. Ransome arrayed herself in her violet silk, and prepared to receive such of her friends as the market-day brought "to town," as to go out for the remaining part of the day, remarking coldly that she did not think any one was likely to call whom she should care to see.

Altogether it was with hardly concealed joy on her part, and an equal sense of relief on that of the relations whom she

left behind her, that Miss Ransome re-entered the train on Saturday morning, and was whirled away towards the metropolis.

## CHAPTER IX.

"Wie ist doch die Erde so schön, so schön!
Das wissen die Vögelein;
Sie heben ihr leicht Gefieder
Und singen so fröhliche Lieder
In den blauen Himmel hinein."

REINICK.

WE must now take leave for a time of our offended heroine and return to Maude, whom we last saw a fortnight ago, in the cab that conveyed her to Mrs. Carew's in Lower Belgrave Street. She had gone there with a very sore heart, but the consideration and kindness which she experienced from her cousin, soon produced a comforting effect upon her.

She and Effie had one long talk over

the source of her unhappiness, in which Maude learnt that old Mr. Simmonds had, on hearing what had occurred, immediately come up to London; had refunded the money abstracted by his son, and had induced the committee to promise that, so long as he remained out of England, no proceedings should be taken against him. After that, by common consent, they returned no more to the subject; and if, now and then, Maude spent an hour in the back drawing-room with the newspaper, and, at the end of it, had mastered none of the details of the "Awful Railway Collision," or the "Destructive Earthquake in Peru," no one said anything about it.

One day Lady Loder came to dine, and found the party so gay and happy, that she remarked afterwards to Mrs. Carew, "It was too bad of you to give me such a fright about Maude; I don't believe she

ever had the slightest feeling for that young scamp."

Effie made an evasive answer, and turned the conversation to other topics. Age and experience may bring wisdom on most things, but they certainly have the reverse effect on all that concerns love affairs; and great is often the wonder of the younger generation, who are the confidants of these same love affairs, to hear the wildly erroneous conclusions propounded by their seniors, who are not in the secret; but who talk as if they were gifted with a special insight into such matters. She was too well used to her aunt's unpenetrating guesses to be much surprised.

She knew that Maude had had a good deal of feeling for "that young scamp"—much more than in all probability she would have had if her surroundings had been more congenial to her. It is the girls who

have happy homes, where their sympathies are occupied, who are hard to please in respect of suitors; not those like Maude, who was a little stray bird without a nest, and therefore all the more liable to be snapped up by some hawk or weasel.

But Effie knew, too, that she had not given that love to Eustace Simmonds which it was in her to give; and she knew, besides, that Maude felt a considerable amount of indignation at the way she had been treated by him, and that a little resentment is a great curative to a wounded heart.

"I wish she could marry happily," she said to herself, as she kissed her hand to her young cousin before she drove off on Monday afternoon, well provided with the huge chests, without which no well-to-do Englishwoman can travel, to meet Lady Loder at Victoria Station.

On the platform she found her chaperon and Mme. Sophie in a state of great excitement about a second edition of enormous boxes, which were in imminent danger of being wrongly labelled; but soon that universal restorer of peace, the whistle for departure, sounded, and they were off for their Whitsun holiday.

How green and fresh the country looks at that time of year! The trees and hedgerows have a variety of colour, which has settled down to a heavy monotonous green, by the time that the longest day is a month past, and the general exodus takes place. The robber buttercups, amid the long grass, wave and glow in the sun, in a manner which is but a dream to those who see the meadows only in the shorn glories of the aftermath; the very cattle in the fields look more appreciative of the brightness and warmth, than they do later

in the year, when, poor short-memoried things, they have come to look on them as their right; the birds flit about and sing their best, not having as yet exhausted all they have to say to one another. Lady Loder was deep in Ouida's last novel, so Maude had nothing to disturb her thoughts; and she lay back in her corner, and drank her fill of the sweet country sights; and her heart swelled with a yearning for her quiet home, with the sweet country sounds, far away among the friends who had loved her in a way that had given rise to no bitterness and regrets.

An hour brought them to Rotherby Station, and then emerged from various other carriages, further detachments of Lord Glamorgan's expected guests, who had travelled down by the same train unbeknown to the Loders.

There was Lady Vivian, a very fat,

very deaf old lady, and her two daughters; a trio with whom Lady Loder was slightly acquainted in London. The eldest girl was dark and handsome, but indolent-looking; she sat down on a bench and waited calmly whilst her sister and the maid collected all the bags and shawls and umbrellas. The second daughter was tall and well made, but had a comical little crunched-up face, with small black eyes, a shaggy fringe, a rather flat nose, high spirits, a great flow of language, and a general impression that, as Nature had not turned her out a beauty, she must look to some other line for her advancement.

Next came Mr. Gosford, an elderly bachelor in the Foreign Office, and with him was Sir Walter Grenville, whom Lady Loder greeted with great enthusiasm. The travellers distributed themselves in the carriages that had been sent to meet them,

and in a few minutes had passed the lodge gates, and were driving along the approach to the Castle.

The park was one of the finest in England. On the right, standing together in groups, were countless magnificent oaks, some erect in their prime, some rent and ragged with age; beneath them lay herds of half-tame deer, too used to the sights and sounds of civilization, to mind the roll of the wheels; on the left was the lake, with its multitudes of foreign water-birds of strange plumage; and in front, the fine old castle, standing as it had stood since the days of Edward III., backed by the Penforth Hills, with their red-stemmed Scotch firs, and more oaks like those in the park below.

Maude was speechless with admiration; even Lady Loder was struck with the beauty of the scene.

Lord Glamorgan received his cousins in the big hall, and having ascertained that they were neither of them tired, and that they required no rest, he took them out to join others of his friends who had arrived earlier in the day, and were now having tea under the great cedar on the terrace.

"I don't know if you have met the Morpeths?" he said. "He is canon of Beetenham Cathedral; I dare say you have heard him preach. His wife is a pleasant woman. Several people have failed us, as usual; but we have Mr. Campbell, the artist, who wants to sketch in the park, and Mrs. Campbell; Mr. Donne, our champion tennis-player; Captain Hotham, whom I think you know. Oh yes, and the Mappins—Sir John and Lady Mappin; they have the great jam-factory at Rotherby, and are most kind and useful in the place."

The necessary introductions were made, and Lord Rotherby, the only child of the house, came forward and shook hands. He was a fragile-looking young man of about twenty, who had been too delicate to go to school, and had consequently the manners of a home brought up youth. His hair was too long, and his speech too measured for general popularity; at first sight his more rough-and-ready contemporaries used to wish that they "could kick that fellow," though, after a longer acquaintance, they usually came to the conclusion that he "wasn't such a bad chap after all."

After some tea and a stroll in the garden, the ladies went up to their rooms; and Maude found herself in a large and somewhat dreary apartment, hung with tapestry, and furnished with stiff damask-covered chairs, a huge fourpost bedstead,

and a wardrobe big enough to contain the whole of the forty thieves. She felt rather depressed by the chilly magnificence of the place. She stood for a while studying the hunting scene depicted on the walls. A party of tall men, with very small heads, and mounted on strangely caparisoned steeds, were following hounds of a breed at present unknown in England; and in the right-hand corner, the boar, succumbing to the foremost of the pack, was wallowing in even more crimson worsted blood, than the occasion seemed to warrant. It took her some time to disentangle the legs of the prancing horses, and assign them to their rightful owners, but there was a strange fascination in the task. At last it was completed, and, with a sigh of relief, she turned to the window to enjoy the glorious view, and to think over the prospects of the party.

The people who attracted her most were Mr. and Mrs. Morpeth, and the second Miss Vivian. The canon and his wife were the kind of cordial, homely people who set every one near them at their ease; and Miss Vivian, with her funny little Tartar face, and look of irrepressible fun, took her fancy too. She was a great talker, rattling away with any nonsense that came into her head; much addicted apparently to playing practical jokes, and given to divulging everything she ought to have kept secret about her own and everybody else's affairs.

At last Mlle. Sophie appeared, and, with her assistance, Maude was arrayed in white satin and natural orchids, and went down to the hall, where she found all the rest already assembled. The only unoccupied seat seemed to be one next Lady Vivian, which she took with some misgiving, as

that lady's deafness made her a rather formidable neighbour.

"Have you seen the afternoon paper?" inquired Lady Vivian, turning to her.

"Yes. There was nothing in it besides the account of an awful fire at Hull, in one of the mills."

"Where?"

"At Hull." This very loud. "Thirty people were burnt to death."

"Thirteen?"

"Thirty."

Here Lord Glamorgan came to the rescue. "Will you have the *Pall Mall?*" he said, giving it to her; "this is the paragraph about the fire."

"A fire? Bless me! Was any one hurt?"

Elspeth Vivian was looking on with a twinkle in her eyes. "I don't think you need trouble yourself to make conversation

to mamma," she observed; "she is only assailable at a particular angle to her left ear, and that angle it is very difficult to discover."

"I suppose she can hear you?"

"Oh yes!—when I mean her to do so, that is. But I am not sure that a deaf mother is not an exceptional mercy. It has one drawback. Clara and I have to scream, till we risk altogether losing that soft voice which is 'an excellent thing in woman,' but otherwise it is an unquestionable advantage. She would never have tolerated half my doings if she had known of them; and as it is, we have all the good parts of possessing a chaperon, and none of the bad. 'So sad for girls not to have a mother to go out with,'"—this she said laughing—"but far sadder, I think, to have one who would interview one privately, and scold one for each indiscreet remark."

"The most acute of mothers couldn't do that by you, Elspeth," said Clara, who had joined them. "The strongest constitution, and the most enduring powers, would be overtasked."

Here the gong sounded, and, in a few minutes, Maude found herself seated at the dinner-table between Mr. Morpeth and Captain Hotham, before a great deal of old plate, and a great many hot-house flowers.

Sir Walter Grenville's hopes were dashed by being desired to take the eldest Miss Vivian, who, not liking to sit with her back to the window, placed herself far down the table on the same side as Maude, thus debarring him from the possibility of even looking at her.

"I will put my *menu* here," said Captain Hotham, setting it on the top of his champagne glass, "and then you can take a peep at it on the sly."

"Thank you; that is really a most considerate suggestion. I was just going to ask you to give it me when you had done with it."

"'Potage à la bisque.' A good beginning."

"I wish they would write the names in English. I wonder why they don't?"

"I suppose some of them are untranslatable; and then we 'snobs of England' like to be thought to have French cooks."

"And so poor Mrs. Snob has to sit half the afternoon with Soyer in one hand and Tarver in the other, trying to make out whether *mayonnaise* has two '*n*'s' or one, and whether *mulet* is, or is not, the legitimate translation of 'mullet.'"

"I don't mind bill-of-fare French; I'm quite used to that; but I must say I'm rather floored abroad, especially in Germany."

"Well, it is some consolation that our county newspaper has conclusively proved that English only, will be spoken in the millennium. Being the best of languages, it says, how could any other then be used?"

"The only fear is, the present system will outlast our time."

"And I am not sure I should like a world in which Olendorf, and the 'white dog of the baker's grandmother,' were things of the past."

"Captain Hotham," put in Mrs. Campbell from the other side, "may I ask you for the salt?"

She was a pretty little woman, who had been very much made of in India, the year that Mr. Campbell painted his great Himalayan picture; she also had a weakness for guardsmen, and when one had taken her in to dinner, she had no intention that

he should speak much to any one but herself.

"Did not you have a very hot journey, Miss Loder?" asked Mr. Morpeth. "We drove over from Beetenham, and found it delightful; but the railway must have been less pleasant."

"No," said Maude. "I think I like being grilled. I took a book in my hand, just to prevent myself from imagining I wanted to read, and looked lazily out of the window the whole time."

"What author did you choose, to have this repellent effect?"

"Oh, any author would have done—it was no bad compliment to him; and, indeed, he was one of my favourite writers—George Macdonald. The book was 'Alec Forbes.' Do you know it?"

"I read it years ago, when it first came out, and remember liking it; but I have

forgotten it completely, all except one remark."

"What was that?"

"It was merely an incidental observation that I do not think you are very likely to have noticed. It was to the effect that wickedness destroys individuality, and reduces people to a dead level."

"I don't remember that bit. Why did it make such an impression on you?"

"Because I had always had a theory that goodness, not wickedness, lessened individuality, and, to see the exact reverse stated, struck me. I don't think I give in now, much as I admire George Macdonald."

"I am not sure I quite see what you mean."

"Why, religious people have all one model, and one standard—namely, perfection—and that necessarily renders them more or less like one another. Goodness

is one; but evil is endlessly diverse, and lends itself much more to the formation of diverse character. Then, as regards conversation, the careless man says exactly what he likes, and is funny here, and amusing there, when a man whose tongue is under control would keep silence."

"Yes, I understand: for example, when flippant or ill-natured talk was going on. And yet it seems hard that his goodness should put him at a disadvantage in any respect."

"Well, if it is so, it is a sacrifice that must be made to the Master; and he is more than compensated in another way."

"In another world, do you mean?"

"Not at all! Here, below. If a man's principles restrain him from being as good company as he might otherwise be, they furnish him with all the more trust-winning, solid qualities. If he is less

amusing, from not acting and talking at random, he is more dependable, which is a far higher merit. His friends know they can trust him in deed and in word. They feel sure he will not misrepresent them behind their backs, nor make good stories out of their weaknesses. They may laugh and admire less, but they love more."

"Yes," said Maude, heartily; "one certainly does not give most of one's affection to the people who are merely funny and entertaining."

"And another advantage the religious man has, is that his character is so much refined by his religion; I, who live a great deal amongst the clergy, see that. I often come across young men, from quite the middle class, who have taken holy orders from high motives; they may not have much outward polish, but they are men of quick sympathies, elevated thoughts.

and thorough gentlemanlike feeling. Then perhaps I meet a brother who has another profession, and another standard: the difference runs through the whole tone and manner of the man; he seems to belong to another grade of society."

Maude was silent; she was considering whether she had noticed this among her acquaintance and friends.

"Miss Loder," said Captain Hotham, "do defend me from Mrs. Campbell; she is attacking me for not liking 'Theophrastus Such.'"

"Then I think you will be between two fires, Captain Hotham; for I like it very much myself. What have you to say against it?"

"Why, for one thing, the thoughts are concealed behind the language, and when you have got at them——"

"They amply repay you," interrupted Mrs. Campbell.

"Sorry to differ from you," drawled the gentleman, in his usual languid way. "I quite know how hateful I must be to my species, without having my attention drawn to a dozen new faults, which must render me even more detestable to them than I suspected; and as to my neighbours, I don't want to have all their failings, which have hitherto escaped me, pointed out to my notice. There is already one house to which I can't go, because my host is always asking leading questions to find out the price of everything I possess; and another that I have given up, because my hostess is perpetually quoting a conversation she once had with John Stuart Mill. Why should I be put off the remaining few, by being led to detect things quite intolerable in them?"

Maude saw that Mrs. Campbell did not wish that she should be included in the

discussion, so she replied, "I see that we are not at all agreed, so I shall leave you unprotected to the tender mercies of Mrs. Campbell."

"I think Captain Hotham is right to a great extent," remarked Mr. Morpeth.

"Do you, indeed?" exclaimed Maude, surprised.

"I doubt whether it is advisable to be always striving to detect and guard against possible weaknesses in one's self; and I am sure it is very undesirable to be constantly in search of them in others. The one is enervating, and the other uncharitable; and both make people too sensitive to do and to bear, as they should do and bear, in this world of mixed good and evil. That self-torturing, critical spirit seems to me one of the great vices of the rising generation."

"We are certainly not an enduring race

about small things; we could have a finger cut off without flinching, but we cannot stand the tiny worries of life. In my soberer moments I often laugh at the trifles that exasperate me at other times."

"Pray confide them to me, that I may do my best to avoid them whilst I am with you."

"One of the worst is a trick of an old uncle of mine who used to come and stay with us at Selby. When he wants anything (for he is an invalid, and can't fetch and carry for himself) he taps three times on the floor with his stick, and points to it, instead of asking some one to give it him: when these taps come for the fiftieth time in the day, it is really very aggravating.—Oh yes! and another most provoking habit in the same uncle is that of saying 'you know' at the end of every phrase, whether one knows or not; how-

ever, half the world do that, as well as he. Now, you are not to laugh," she added, seeing a smile on Mr. Morpeth's face.

"I am not laughing; it would be inhuman to ridicule such woes. I am glad, however, to think that I never tap three times with a stick when I want anything, and that I have already fought and conquered the habit of saying 'you know,' when there is no question of knowing anything."

Here their attention was attracted by peals of laughter from Elspeth Vivian. She was tormenting Mr. Donne with stories the point of which he could not see, riddles which he could not guess, and questions which puzzled him to decide whether they were riddles or chaff. He was a slow young man, first-rate at out-of-door games and sporting, but seen to less advantage

in society. He never was quite sure whether the laugh was with him or against him, and he rarely understood the drift of a remark till he had slept on it, after which it had become rather late to make a brilliant rejoinder. He was suffering a good deal under Miss Vivian's persecution, but yet he was partly enchanted by her; and she seemed to be highly diverted by her companion.

When dinner was over, Lady Loder said it was a pity to lose so fine an evening, and proposed that they should fetch some wraps, and go for a turn on the terrace. The gentlemen soon followed, and Sir Walter had at length an opportunity of joining Maude.

"I call this perfect!" he exclaimed. "Isn't it delicious to be in the clear cool air, after that smoky, smutty London?"

"You are a most fickle person," she

replied; "only the other day you were singing the praises of 'smoky, smutty London,' as if there was no other such place in the world."

"Nor there is, after all. Still, the country has its merits. As the children say, 'I like both best.'"

They sauntered along the broad gravel walk. The bright silvery moon threw sharp shadows at their feet; here and there a last autumn's leaf came forth from its retreat, and rustled along after them in the draught made by their passing; all else was still and calm. The breeze was heavy with the scent of spring blossoms; little currents of air, now hot and dry, now cold and damp, drew across their faces; the bats wheeled round and round their heads. Not far off were voices laughing and talking together in groups, or speaking in lower tones as a couple

of friends strolled away from the rest beneath the trees.

Maude was calmly and peacefully happy; she was enjoying the absence of the London roar; she was enjoying the sweetness and restfulness of the night. Not so Sir Walter; he had a hundred things he wanted to say to her, a hundred questions he wanted to ask. He was not a shy man; words in plenty usually found their way to his tongue; yet here he was walking beside the girl whom he loved, and not a thing could he think of to say. How awkward the silence was growing! Presently his companion broke it with a trivial question.

"How did you like Miss Vivian at dinner?"

"Oh, I liked her; she is a good sort of girl, I think; but I don't know that we got on particularly. I had hoped that I might have been near you."

"Isn't it odd how much better one feels to know people whom one has met half a dozen times in the country, than those one sees every night in London?"

"Yes!" he said, his heart beating. "You and I are quite old friends, are we not?"

"Quite," she answered lightly. "I suppose it is because at parties one only sees a little corner of people. Now, I might have met you at a hundred balls, without finding out how you look after your schools and your place, and how you spoil your dogs, till they die of hot fires and over-eating, in middle age; the knowledge of all that, lets me into the secret of your tastes and character more than three months of ball talk."

Sir Walter was gratified. He did not delude himself; he knew that Maude did not entertain for him the feelings which he had towards her; but a special intimacy, and relations of good fellowship above

those which existed between her and any other member of the party, furnished at least a favourable starting-point. If two or three meetings in the country had had so good an effect, what might not be hoped from more of the same nature? This thought was in his mind as he answered, apparently rather far from the point—

"Shall you be staying at Selby later in the year?"

"I don't know," she returned. "If my cousin would only consent, I should so like to go there with her, for the summer months. She might just as well do that as go to Scotland or Switzerland, when London breaks up."

"I wish she would," he said eagerly; "do make her." And then, seeing that his companion looked a little surprised at his energy, he hastened to add, by way of qualification, "It is so awfully lonely at

Shustone, and there are so few neighbours. Not but that I feel it as little as anybody could. I am used to being alone; I never had any home."

"Had you never any brothers or sisters?"

"No. My father and mother both died when I was quite a small boy, and at five I went to a lady's school at Malvern. She was good to me, and therefore the other boys hated me, and used to stick pins into my legs, and put sand in my pudding, so that the holidays which I spent at the school were my only good time."

"Poor little creature!" said Maude, pityingly. "Did you stay there long?"

"Till I was ten; and then I was sent to Cheam, and afterwards to Eton. But I used to feel awfully jealous on the 4th of June, when the other fellows had friends who came down, and sisters to go about

with, and no end of tips, and I had to wander about alone. It's tremendously against a fellow having no relations."

"It must be very sad," answered Maude. "I can't remember my father or mother; but I had my aunt, and I don't know what I should have done without her."

"Yes, one person would make all the difference," he said, thinking more of his own future possibilities, than of his companion's past. "Of course, all the fellows I was most fond of had other people that they cared for more than they did for me. There was one at Cheam—George Rowney—I used to follow about like a little dog, and cry if he got swished; and then one day his brother came down, and he gave me a kick because I came into his room, where they were sitting talking together."

"I always think boys are little savages," said Maude.

"Oh no; they don't understand, that is all. I wonder if it will be the same all my life, and if I shall never have any one to take an interest in me?"

"I hope not!" exclaimed Maude, impulsively, and then stopped short. It is not easy for a young lady of nineteen to tell a young man of four and twenty that there may be days of companionship and affection in store for him.

"I know most fellows marry," he said simply; "but, Miss Loder, it isn't every one I should care to marry; and perhaps——"

"Don't let us contemplate such unfortunate possibilities as that you should never find any one to suit you," said Maude, laughing. "I think there is something in moonlight that makes one mournful. Hark! what is that noise?"

"Only an owl," replied Sir Walter.

"There seem to be a great many here; I heard them snoring and too-hooing all the time I was dressing."

"What a noise they make!"

"Don't they? But we men are the animals which have the least power of any, of making ourselves heard. I saw once, in a natural history book, that if a cricket's voice was multiplied in strength, by the number of times man exceeds him in size, he would be heard all the way from here to St. Petersburg."

For some time longer they strolled about together, talking of indifferent matters, and feeling very contented and happy in each other's company; and then a voice sounded from a distance. "Maude, where are you? It is getting damp, and we are going in." It was Lady Loder who was calling; and the pair turned homeward, and joined the rest at the front door.

The worst part of after-dinner walks is that the house feels so fearfully, intolerably stuffy on returning to it. The most agreeable assemblage of wits and geniuses could be nothing but commonplace bores, if transferred from moonlight, and the clear canopy of the heavens, to the glare of lamps and candles, and the exhausted atmosphere of a drawing-room ; how much more so the ordinary party at Lord Glamorgan's! Signs of lassitude and dejection appeared, and no one responded to the host's cheerful question, "Is it too late for a round game, or some music?" Captain Hotham tried to engage Lady Vivian in a conversation about the relative merits of wood pavement and asphalte; but finding that she thought he had inquired whether they had any nightingales at Inglebar, he had not the energy to recommence the assault, and relapsed into silence with a

yawn, which Lady Loder took as a hint, and soon gave the signal for going up-stairs.

"I shall come into your room presently, if I may," said Elspeth Vivian to Maude, as they parted on the landing; and, good as her word, she presented herself within ten minutes, in a many-coloured dressing-gown, at Maude's door.

"I always think these nocturnal visits are the best part of the four and twenty hours," she exclaimed. "Now, in ten minutes we will be friends, and you shall tell me all your secrets."

"Indeed I shan't," replied Maude, laughing.

"Then I will tell you mine, which will do just as well. What do you think of Mr. Donne?"

"I don't know; I haven't had any opportunity of speaking to him."

"Did you hear that we are all going to-morrow to the archery meeting at Ripstone? Well, Mr. Donne says he is sure to have to propose the health of the ladies, and I am going to write his speech."

"Are you, indeed?"

"Yes, and that before the inspiration is off;—now, before I go to bed!"

"He will never get through it. You will have to finish it for him."

"I don't care if I do. Oh, wasn't Clara disgusted at dinner! I was sure she was meaning to get up a flirtation with Sir Walter Grenville, and he——"

"He what?"

"Now, don't pretend that you don't see quite plainly that he is bewitched by you."

"By me? Nonsense! I hardly know him at all."

"Listen to her!" said Elspeth, convulsed with laughter. "She hardly knows him

at all. I wonder what he would say to that?"

"Don't invent such fictions," said Maude, vexed; "it makes one shy and uncomfortable with people for nothing."

"Oh no, not at all! and if it did make you a little shy, that would be very becoming. If you were a young man I shouldn't say a word. I wonder why," pursued she, lapsing into a philosophic mood—"I wonder why men are so different to girls in that respect? They will all cut their nearest and dearest, if any one starts a report they are going to marry her. I have had it done to me scores of times; and it is so tiresome, because one can't say, 'I quite understand that you are not going to propose to me, and I don't in the least wish you to do so; but do let us go on being friends.' Is there a bit of paper in the drawer?" she went on, the reflective

mood having suddenly terminated. "I know what I mean him to say, so it won't take a minute;" and she sat down and scribbled a page very rapidly.

"Will the Bow-meeting be amusing?" asked Maude.

"Oh no, awful! It is all very well for the natives who know each other, but for the outsiders it is quite the reverse. However, I generally manage to beguile the time somehow. And now I shall just call Mathews, and make her slip this paper under Mr. Donne's door, that he may find it when he comes back from the smoking-room."

"Do read it to me."

"Oh no; that would spoil it all for to-morrow."

Mathews came, but flatly refused to be Miss Vivian's messenger. That she, after fifty years of irreproachable respectability,

should be seen thrusting notes at midnight under young gentlemen's doors, was a thing not to be thought of; so Elspeth said good night to her friend, and trotted off down the passage to deposit her billet herself; whilst Maude sat and thought over what she had said about Sir Walter Grenville's liking for herself.

She knew that often lookers-on see most of the game; but she fancied her loquacious little acquaintance might very likely have a vivid imagination, and be on the look-out for more than there was to see. She herself had never traced in him anything more than ordinary friendship. True, he had spoken very confidentially to her that evening; but, then, moonlight walks are known to lend themselves to confidences; and certainly, if he had any such thoughts of her as Elspeth had suggested, he would never have discussed the prospects of his

future life so calmly with her, and then at a moment's notice have stopped and talked of the vocal powers of owls and crickets. It really would be very silly to worry herself for nothing; and though nothing could be sadder than that that nice merry boy should grow attached to her, when she had not the slightest feeling for him, the whole thing was so unlikely, that she really might banish all fear from her mind.

But for once Miss Loder was quite wrong, as people generally are when they found elaborate theories upon such extremely slight foundations. The world is very fond of concluding a great deal from the fact that Mr. A. is perpetually talking of Miss B., or that Miss F. looked conscious when Mr. G. was mentioned, but it is generally widely astray in its deductions. It requires more than mere ac-

quaintance to interpret these signs; close friendship often fails to read them aright; and firm as she was in her conviction, Maude had not that intimate knowledge of Sir Walter Grenville's disposition, which might have enabled her to judge of him correctly.

He had changed the subject of their talk at her leading, because he felt he was beginning to tread on dangerous ground. He knew the time had not come for making his avowal; he had been going too fast, and was glad to embrace the opportunity she gave him of drawing up; but none the less was it his firm and fixed intention to recur to the subject at no very distant day.

END OF VOL. II.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES. *R. T. T.*

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

BY

MARY A. LEWIS,

AUTHOR OF "A RAT, WITH THREE TALES."

"All the endless occupation without purpose, and idleness without rest, of our vulgar world, are not, it seems to me, enjoyments we need be anxious to communicate. . . . To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over plough-share or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray,—these are the things that make men happy."—JOHN RUSKIN.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1881.

(*All rights reserved.*)

22698/3

1883. Feb. 25,
Gratis.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

# TWO PRETTY GIRLS.

## CHAPTER I.

"Être avec les gens qu'on aime, cela suffit; rêver, leur parler, ne leur parler point, penser à eux, penser à des choses plus indifferentes, mais auprès d'eux tout est égal."—La Bruyère.

Lady Loder made an excellent hostess in a country house. Her practical good sense overcame all the difficulties of managing for a large party, her kindness prompted her to settle everything according to each one's likes and dislikes, and her cheerful spirits and inexhaustible supply of small-talk kept everything going.

"Though it is fine now, I doubt its

remaining so all day, so I think, Glamorgan, that we had better have the break, and the landau, and the victoria. Then, if it rains, we ladies shall at any rate get home in the dry," she said next morning, after consulting the aneroid; and as Lord Glamorgan replied, "By all means, Mary," these carriages were ordered.

Half-past twelve was the hour at which they were to start, in order to reach Ripstone in time for the one o'clock luncheon which preceded the shooting; so there was a couple of hours to dispose of first, and the party dispersed to amuse themselves according to their tastes.

Captain Hotham, faithful as usual to the senior ladies, volunteered to take Lady Vivian and Lady Mappin a turn among the hot-houses; the two Vivian girls, with Sir Walter Grenville and Mr. Donne, betook themselves to the tennis-ground;

Lady Loder disappeared to write letters; and Maude wandered away by herself to explore the uninhabited part of the castle; to look at the view from the top of an old tower, and to gaze into the dungeon, now only tenanted by the toads that were creeping across the damp floor, and weave tales of horror and woe about the imaginary prisoners who had once languished there.

She had made herself so melancholy by the contemplation of their sufferings, that it was a relief to step into the comfortable carriage and drive away into the warm sunshine. Ripstone was situated on the further side of the Penforth Range, and the road zigzagged along the hillside, quite like a miniature mountain-pass; here and there almost overhanging a brawling little burn, that bustled down over the stones, rippling, and glancing, and breaking into a thousand pieces the reflection

of the brilliant blue sky. A light breeze had sprung up, and rustled merrily in the trees overhead; the shadows and lights played with each other on the grass; the light-green ferns unrolled their curly fronds under the influence of the balmy air; the wild rosebuds were almost bursting into blossom, and their large transparent, blood-red thorns seemed to know it, as, with their sharp points, they swayed protectingly backwards and forwards on the wind. The birds sang; the insects flitted hither and thither. No heart could choose but be glad.

"What a lovely day for a drive, and for seeing a new place!" exclaimed Maude to her cousin; and even Lady Loder, who as usual had lost her Chuddah, and was wondering where it could possibly be, could not help sparing a thought to the splendour of the day.

The three carriages kept together, so the whole party arrived at Ripstone at the same time, just as the bell was ringing to assemble the guests in the luncheon-tent.

"Are these the Ashgroves, who inherited a fortune from an old Jew—I forget his name—in Bayswater?" shouted Lady Vivian as they alighted. The old lady fancied she was speaking in an inaudible whisper.

"They succeeded to the place from a Mr. Solomon, of Westbourne Terrace," replied Lady Loder, in agonies as to what was coming next; whilst several Ripstone footmen who were standing in the hall went into fits of suppressed laughter.

"I heard he travelled with her in the railway, and was so delighted with her that he made her his heir. Was that true?"

"Oh no. Hush! Here is Mrs. Ashgrove."

Very soon the party was separated. Lord Glamorgan took Mrs. Ashgrove to the tent; the ladies were escorted by various neighbouring landowners; Mr. Donne and Elspeth, who were becoming fast friends, refused to be parted, and went off together; and Maude found herself seated between a Mr. Franks and Mr. Gosford.

On such occasions there is not much scope for the interchange of ideas; the gentlemen's spare moments are absorbed in carving, the ladies' in endeavouring to avoid the shower of bits and drops, which the best-educated waiter, cramped in all directions for room, can hardly help sprinkling around him.

"This is dreadful!" murmured Mr. Gosford, with a face of patient endurance, as a little bit of lobster went down his collar.

"What does one not suffer in the course of one year's amusements?"

"I think it is rather good fun," replied Maude; "but the tent is put up on such a steep incline that I feel doubtful if our bench is not going over backwards. What do you think?"

Her neighbour's look of misery increased. "And what a draught there is, although it is frightfully stuffy!"

"We shall all catch dreadful colds," said Maude, to tease him; for he was a great hypochondriac, and always dreaming about his health.

"Are you going to shoot, Miss Loder?" asked Mr. Franks.

"No, I am sorry to say I don't. You have some wonderful archeresses in your society, I hear?"

"Yes, we have. Three of our members were among the first seven at the last grand national meeting."

"It takes such an amount of practice to keep one's hand in, that, unless one can shoot regularly, it seems very little use to begin."

"That is quite true. Some of our ladies shoot a couple of hours and more every day."

The heat was increasing from moment to moment. The middle-aged ladies, conscious that their bloom was deepening in an unbecoming manner, could hardly restrain their irritation at such of the company as were showing an uncurbed desire for more grapes, and were thereby deferring the speeches. But the moment came at last. First, of course, they had the toast, "which requires no poor words of mine to recommend it to your notice, being one which every loyal English man and woman never fails to drink with enthusiasm;" then, after a feeble rapping, indicative of

the enthusiasm alluded to, followed an elaborate harangue, in which the young man who was to stand for the county at the next election, proposed the health of the host and hostess. Mr. Ashgrove responded, and then it became known that the health of the ladies was to be proposed, and that Mr. Donne was to do the deed.

There was a long pause. Every eye in the place was fixed on the victim, who felt as if he were glued to his bench. An undertoned exhortation from his neighbour at last got him on his legs. There was a suppressed smile, for Mr. Donne was recognized to be no Demosthenes, and had already several times ignominiously failed, when the path to oratorical distinction lay open before him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "you all know a saying dear to reviewers when they want to be especially down on

an author: 'There are new things and true things in this book, but the things that are new are not true, and the things that are true are not new.' I stand before you with a painful consciousness that, whatever I can say, must deserve a like criticism. This is the fortieth year in which this society has held three annual meetings, therefore two hundred and twenty —no, one hundred and eighty—no——"

"A hundred and twenty," prompted Elspeth.

"Therefore one hundred and twenty speeches have been made, by abler speakers than I am, on this truly inspiring subject. How, then, could I hope to say anything both new and true? You will see at a glance what a fix—a dilemma, I mean, I am in. Now, I should be throwing discredit on you if I supposed you would prefer novelty to veracity, so I will

dismiss all thought of making remarks which shall be in any way original, and will content myself with the undeniable observations of my illustrious predecessors.

"Allow me, then, to call your attention to the fact that we have among us to-day a great number of ladies, some of whom we often have the privilege of meeting in this county, whilst others have honoured us by coming from a distance. Can we be grateful enough for their company? Who does not strain his bowstring with increased ardour when he knows that fair eyes are watching him? which victorous bowman will not feel the value of his prize redoubled by the reflection that gentle hearts are rejoicing at his success, and gentle voices are waiting to offer him their congratulations? I venture, gentlemen, to say that this society would never have reached its present venerable age had it

not been for the cordial support which the ladies have accorded to it. Imagine us disconsolate bachelors marching alone, backwards and forwards, between the targets! I see you all shrink from the thought. Gentlemen, I call upon you to drink with all cordiality the health of the ladies."

Mr. Donne sat down amid much applause and laughter. Never before had he been able to string three sentences together, and taking this into consideration, he really had made a brilliant success. A strong-minded female, who had volunteered to answer for her sex, stood up; but, after several attempts at the beginning of a discourse which she had prepared, was glad to accept a prompt from her neighbour, a fox-hunting squire, to the effect that "she, in the name of the ladies present, begged to thank the company very much

for the kind manner in which they had drunk their health," and then sunk back into private life.

After that the shooters produced their bows, and set themselves to the real business of the day, and those who were not archers went to look at the prizes, to walk in the gardens, or to chat with their friends.

Lady Loder found a gentleman with whom she had been acquainted years ago in Rome, and began to discuss old recollections with him; Lady Vivian sat down on a bench, still attended by the indefatigable Captain Hotham; Clara Vivian gave her shawl to Sir Walter Grenville, and begged him to take care of it for her in case she should be cold—a device which effectually kept him in her neighbourhood; Mr. Campbell went to sketch a large chestnut tree which took his fancy; Elspeth

invited Mr. Donne to walk with her to the top of the hill, as "she had no intention of crawling up and down the shooting ground with those lunatics;" and Maude walked round the garden with Lady Mappin, a good-humoured, homely body, as far as possible removed from the typical rich manufacturess.

"I spent all my early days in a country farm, my dear," she said, "and I feel sadly out of place among all you fine people. I often wish John had never got rich all along of his jam. Money brings cares, it does," she added, as she thought of the five thousand pounds of debts which her son had contracted before leaving Oxford; "and I slept easier than I do now when John was foreman at three guineas a week, and we had lodgings in the High Street."

She was very communicative about her

home affairs. Her children were being converted into ladies and gentlemen by the usual processes. Alfred and Edmund had been at Eton and Christ Church, with enormous allowances to assist them in "making friends." Frederica had married a "lord's" younger son, who had proved anything but a model husband; Annie had been unsatisfactory, and had averted a like fate, by running away with a solicitor's clerk, who had struck up a clandestine friendship, and persuaded her that he "loved her for herself alone." Henrietta, the remaining child, was not yet grown up; all the mother's hopes evidently centred on her, and many were the anecdotes of her talents and charms, which Lady Mappin confided to her young friend as they paced along the walks.

Maude could not help noticing that Sir Walter looked annoyed and bored as he

accompanied Clara from flower-bed to flower-bed, and listened to her horticultural remarks. At last Lady Vivian called out, "Clara, if you are not going to use your shawl, I think I will put it on; I am getting to feel so chilly. Thank you. Will you pin it for me?" And whilst her daughter was employed in fastening the wrap, he managed to slip away.

"Did you see Mrs. Brinsley, Lady Mappin?" he asked, joining the two ladies. "She was inquiring anxiously for you just now."

"Mrs. Brinsley! Violet Pritchard as was?" In moments of excitement Lady Mappin's grammar was liable to occasional lapses. "Lord, no! I haven't seen her. She and I were bosom friends at Miss Blaney's. Will you excuse me leaving you, my dear? I must find her."

"There she is, in the grey gown, just

passing the magnolia. Let me take you to her."

He did so, and in a moment was back again.

"Shall we walk round the pool?" he said to Maude. "There is a beautiful view from the other side."

Elspeth's remarks flashed into her mind. She hesitated and blushed a little; and then, saying to herself, "How silly I am!" replied, "Yes, let us go; I should like to see the view."

Sir Walter noticed the hesitation with a thrill of pleasure. Hitherto she had been on easy, kindly, friendly terms; but now her manner towards him had changed. She looked quite shy, and, as Miss Vivian had predicted, shyness was decidedly becoming. He thought he had never before seen her so lovely.

It was the first day on which she had

put off her mourning, and she was dressed in a suit of dull green, with quantities of creamy lace round her neck and wrists. The close clinging material suited her slender figure, and the olive hat and feathers set off the golden auburn of her hair. The warm moist wind, too, had brought out the colour through her transparent skin, and brightened her large brown eyes.

And yet, remarkable as her features were, it was in their expression that lay their chief charm. As with most simple, single-minded women, her soul lit up her face. It was her calm, thoughtful, true-hearted disposition that shone in her eyes; it was the tender kindliness of her nature that gave meaning to the delicate curves of her mouth. But, sweet and gentle as was her countenance, there was decision in it too. All her life Maude would be able

to say "No" when she chose; but all her life she would say "No" with pain—unlike those persons of weaker character, who, half-conscious of their weakness, make matters worse by "asserting their authority in terms of needless contradiction."

"The beauty of the day is quite gone," she remarked, glancing up at the lead-coloured curtain that had drawn itself over the glories of the morning sky.

"Yes," he replied; "I am not sure that you will not want your waterproofs, after all."

"We can easily get them; Cousin Mary had them strapped together and put in the hall."

"What excellent care she takes of us all! She is a capital head of a country house; everything is always thought of, and yet one does not feel one is under orders, as one perpetually does in some places."

"Yes," answered Maude; "she has gone about so much, and received so many visitors at home, that practice has made her perfect. Besides, she is invariably pleased to have people around her at all times and seasons, and that is the beginning and end of the virtues of a good hostess."

"Of the virtues, yes. But every good hostess must have a tendency to two small vices: she ought to be a little greedy, and a little fond of gossip."

"Yes," replied she, "I dare say they are necessary to good dinners, and good small-talk."

Maude felt quite at her ease; nothing could be further from the realm of sentiment than this style of conversation.

"Tell me how you spend your day in London," he said presently. "I like to be able to think of my friends, and know what they are doing at any given hour."

"We breakfast about ten, and then I play and read till twelve. After that I have an hour's walk, and when I come in I write notes, or do any little matters for my cousin till luncheon-time. We are generally out nearly all the afternoon, and in the evening we have parties and balls to go to. It is a dreadfully useless life, isn't it? I tried to do some parish work once or twice, but my attempts came to grief, so I have given that up."

"How do you mean that they came to grief?"

"I thought I would try and visit in an alley; but, in the very first house, I was locked in, and made to pay thirty-five shillings for a rusty old hinge not worth eighteen-pence."

She expected her companion to laugh, but was taken aback by his reply. "For mercy's sake, Miss Loder," he said,

vehemently, "don't do such things; it is most unfitting. You must not try those experiments; it is dangerous, wrong!"

She looked up in amazement, but at the sight of his eager face her eyes fell. "I should have thought you would have understood my wish to be useful."

"Useful!" he repeated, with a tone of manly scorn at puny female effort. "Of what use do you suppose a girl like you could be in such a spot? The low parts of London are not fit places for you to walk in alone. What did Lady Loder say when she heard what had happened?"

"I never told her," said Maude, falteringly; "I thought she would laugh so. I did not know there was any harm in what I did."

"Well," he said, relenting, "promise that you will not do anything so rash again."

"No, I will not," she answered. "I was so frightened that time, that I resolved never to venture into any such out-of-the-way quarters any more."

The whole thing was very puzzling to Maude. She felt she had committed a crime of which she had no means of measuring the magnitude. She had thought that Sir Walter, to whom no man, woman, or child on his estate was a stranger, would have appreciated her desire to work among the London poor; but instead of that he was shocked and put out with her. Generally, for some unexplained pyschological reason, a young man who scolds a young lady thereby puts himself on terms of exceptional friendship with her, but a sense of having been unjustly treated prevented this effect in the present case. Maude did not speak, and Sir Walter, too, was silent. He had shown

more feeling than he had intended, when the thought of her danger had pressed itself upon him; he felt that their friendship was not where it had been five minutes before; either she was startled and vexed by his vehemence, or it had revealed an interest in her well-being which passed that of mere acquaintance.

They walked along side by side, and no sound was heard save the sighing of the breeze in the firs overhead, and the gentle lapping of the waters of the pool against the bank.

"Look what a pretty fringe the May-blossoms and laburnums have made all along the edge of the lake; the branches have been nearly stripped of them since the wind rose," she remarked in a constrained voice.

"Yes," he replied absently.

"Tell me something about your Irish

stay," she said, in an easier tone. This was a subject in which there must be something more than monosyllables to be had. "Sir Frederick Wingfield said they had tried to burn your house down. I hadn't heard of that. Was it true?"

"Yes. One night, just as I was going to bed, I saw a man prowling about in the garden, so I called my man, Brown, and we set ourselves to watch him. The larder, that joins the house, is thatched, and we saw him place a ladder against it, and prepare to mount it, with a lantern in his hand. That was rather too much of a good thing, so we crept quietly out of the house in our stockings, and pulled the ladder aside, when he had just taken the bit of candle out of his lantern, and was putting it to the thatch. Down came our gentleman, lantern and all, and Brown and I dragged him into the house."

"And what did you do with him when you had got him there?"

"We asked what he had been at, and as every Irishman has an excuse ready at any moment for any possible emergency, this one, of course, was more innocent than a lamb. He said, 'Sure, your honour, it was only some sparrows out of the thatch for to-morrow's pie that I was after; you wouldn't go to grudge a poor man that.' So we told him he was the greatest liar out, and we should thrash him well, as there was no law in Ireland to do it for us; and we should keep his lantern (which had his name on it) as evidence, in case he liked to have us up for assault. So Brown held him and I flogged him, and he yelled as if he was being killed."

"And would not his next step be to get a gun and shoot you from behind a hedge?"

"Before we let him go we showed him a drawer full of revolvers, and told him that we never stirred without one in each pocket; that we were dead shots, and that if any friend of his wished to try his hand on us, we recommended him to aim straight, or he might be sure he had drunk his last glass of whisky. Then we kicked him out of the house, and let him tell his story where he pleased."

"It must be a horrid thing to have an Irish place, and to feel that everybody on it hates one, and that one's life is in hourly danger."

"It isn't pleasant; but there is an excitement about it; and, after all, there isn't a soul in the world who would care a button if I were dead or alive."

For some time longer they wandered about in the wilderness that surrounded the lake.

"That is rain upon the hills, I think," he said, as they emerged on a clearer spot. "We had better go in, or you will get wet."

The storm came on fast, and before they reached the door it was raining heavily.

Evidently there was no prospect of any further outing. All but the most indomitable archers forsook the targets, and some singing was proposed, which passed the time till the carriages came round.

When the party assembled in the hall, Elspeth and Mr. Donne were missing. The music-room, library, and conservatory were searched, but nowhere were they to be found.

"I do believe that naughty girl has never returned," said Lady Vivian, shivering; "she went up the hill with Mr. Donne. She will be perfectly drenched. Pray, Lady Loder, do not think of her.

I really dread this damp for my neuralgia."

"Very well," replied Lady Loder; "we will go on in the landau. I dare say she will appear before long. You can wait for her, Maude, and come home in the victoria; you will not get wet with the hood up. Mr. Donne must go on the box."

"I don't like leaving you behind, Miss Loder," said Lord Glamorgan. "We will keep the break for a few minutes, and see if they turn up."

In less than a quarter of an hour the truants arrived, as Lady Vivian had prophesied, "perfectly drenched." Nor was that the worst of the matter. Elspeth's once white gown was one mass of mud from head to foot; even her face had not wholly escaped. Her eyes, however, were sparkling with glee, and she seemed not a whit abashed by the horrified glances

which were turned upon her. Mr. Donne showed a far more proper sense of the gravity of the position.

"Oh, we have had such fun!" she cried. "We got up all right, and there was a herd of cattle grazing, and the old bull ran after us, and we had to scramble over a hedge to get out of his way. There was a ditch on the other side, and Mr. Donne didn't see it, and pulled me right in."

"Do come upstairs, and let me give you some dry clothes," urged Mrs. Ashgrove.

"Oh dear, no, thank you! Please help me on with my ulster, Lord Glamorgan. There! that hides a multitude of sins. Now let us start. I shall come inside with you, Maude; I want to tell you all about the bull. And Sir Walter will take care of us on the box—will you not?"

The break was the first of the two

carriages that were standing at the door; and, tired of waiting, the rest of the party got in, and began to pack themselves up under waterproof rugs. When they were all settled, and had driven off a few yards, mischievous Elspeth shouted—

"Stop! I have changed my mind; I am coming with you. I like to be high up; and besides, I am oozing, and should spoil Maude's dress;" and, merely laughing at her friend's remonstrances, she clambered into the break, and seated herself by Mr. Donne. "All right—off!" she said to the coachman; and on they drove, leaving Maude and Sir Walter to follow in the victoria.

"She really is too bad," he said, with pleasure gleaming from his eyes. "Now you will lose the story about the bull. Must I go outside in the rain, or will you take me with you, as there is room?"

"Come inside, if you like it best," said Maude, shortly.

She was thoroughly vexed, and would not smile. It was unreasonable enough to visit Elspeth's transgression on poor Walter; but Maude was too much put out to be reasonable. She was angry with Miss Vivian for her monkey's trick, angry with Sir Walter for treating the matter so lightly, and distressed at the idea that he might, as she did, see through the manœuvre. She was determined, at any rate, to show that the *tête-à-tête* was not of her seeking. She originated no single remark during the drive, and cut short all her companion's attempts at conversation. She refused to be mollified throughout the evening, and bestowed all her smiles on Lord Rotherby, to that young man's great delight and Sir Walter's proportionate misery.

"Have I sinned past forgiveness?" said Elspeth, as they wished each other good night on the landing; and receiving no answer, "I won't be sent to Coventry like that!" she exclaimed, and bounced through the door into Maude's room. "Pity your poor supplicant," she continued, with mock penitence, falling on her knees. "Forgive me; I only did it in joke."

"I can see no fun at all in such jokes," replied Mande, trying to be stern.

"I acknowledge the error of my ways, and won't do so no more," said Elspeth. "There! what else do you want?—repentance, and promise of amendment! I can do nothing beyond. Am I forgiven?"

"Yes, yes! don't be so silly! Do get up," said Maude, laughing.

"I wish you could have seen the bull," pursued Elspeth, prudently changing the subject. "Mr. Donne dragged me over

the hedge, or I should never have escaped; and then on the way home he grew quite sentimental. It was too amusing; I was so very dirty, I could not have been sentimental if I had tried. He became downright pathetic about the mess I had helped him out of with regard to his speech; to which I said it was rather hard that, by way of return, he had got me into a mess; and didn't he look snubbed!"

"I think you are treating that poor fellow very badly," observed Maude.

"Not at all," replied Elspeth. "You don't seriously think he is falling in love with me, do you? Besides, it would be rather fun if he did propose to me. Young men think that girls are always sighing for a husband, and it is too comic to see their faces when you refuse them; they can't believe in such audacity. There was one I knew last year, who had that aggra-

vating habit of impressing on you that flirting was all he meant, by perpetually saying, 'Poor Snooks!' or 'Poor Jones! so he's going to be married too! How I pity him!' Well, of course I couldn't resent these speeches at the time; but at last my charms were too many for him, and he proposed to me. Wasn't I pleased! My revenge came then. You should have seen what a fool he looked when I said 'No.' It was rich! By-the-by, did you see Mr. Donne's sister? Such a funny, hideous little creature!"

"I don't think I did. Was she near us at luncheon?"

"Yes, opposite; further down the table. She was quite too ugly for anything."

"How hard you are upon ugliness!"

"You think a fellow-feeling should make me wondrous kind?" inquired Elspeth.

"No, indeed," said Maude.

"I know I'm ugly," Elspeth went on, unheeding; "but, then, I've a smart figure, and dress up well, and that makes all the difference. She was one of those hopeless little mortals who haven't a single good point about them."

"Probably she is quite unaware of the fact," said Maude, "and so doesn't in any way deserve your pity."

"No doubt. I always say it is the most convincing proof of a Providence above (although one not, as far as I am aware, noticed by divines) that the ugliest of the race are always not colour blind, but looking-glass blind. Yet, after all, I am not sure it would not be less depressing if they knew that the neglect with which the world treats them is merely due to an unpleasing exterior. It must be dreadful for them to see that nobody wants to take them to dinner, or to have them at their

house for a ball, or dance with them at the ball, and to find that even the Sunday school children avoid their class, and all the while not have a suspicion why. If the cause was once recognized, they might go in for some other line—fastness, or blueness, or music, or authorship, and get up a clique of their own. As it is, those miserable little beings mostly plod through a crushed, blighted existence, up to the age of ninety. They are all long-lived."

"Poor Miss Donne! I am very sorry for her," said Maude.

"So am I. I asked Bertie about her."

"Who?"

"Bertie—her brother; and he said she was a good soul, but not up to much."

## CHAPTER II.

"O my life, have we not had seasons
That only said, live and rejoice!
That asked not for causes and reasons,
But made us all feeling and voice;
When we went with the winds in their blowing,
When nature and we were peers,
And we seemed to share in the flowing
Of the inexhaustible years?"

LOWELL.

THE weather had cleared during the night, and most of the gentlemen started immediately after breakfast for the river. Mr. Morpeth declined being of the party; Sir Walter Grenville also made an excuse and stayed behind; and Mr. Campbell prepared to go on with his artistic pursuits.

"May we see your yesterday's sketch?" asked Lady Loder, as he passed through the drawing-room on his way to the park.

Mr. Campbell was a painter of the highly ideal school, and the chestnut tree that, in answer to this request, was displayed before them owed a good deal to the realms of fancy. The foliage was highly imaginative, and stripes of red and blue adorned the trunk.

"I flatter myself that I am about the top of the tree as regards tree-painting," remarked Mr. Campbell, making his favourite joke in a well-satisfied voice, and viewing his production with his head very much on one side. "Till the sun went in the lights and shades were magnificent; a real feast to an artist's eye. Now you, I dare say, would not have seen all those colours on the trunk; but I did."

"No, I cannot say I perceived them,"

responded Lady Loder. "What a splendid tree it is!"

"What a privilege to spend one's life in the worship and service of Nature!" exclaimed Mr. Campbell, fervently; "the confidant of her secrets, the discerner of her inner mysteries, her interpreter to mankind."

"I know you artists say you enjoy nature, and see more in it than we outsiders do," remarked Sir Walter; "but I never feel quite convinced."

"Here is the proof. Did you see those colours in that trunk?"

"No; but the question is—were they there? and that is just what it is impossible to prove."

"But of course they were there, else why should I have painted them? Your untrained eye doesn't detect the finer harmonies of colouring. The beauties of nature flee before you."

"But if I say that what I saw—a smooth grey trunk with lights breaking across its surface, and a mottling of leaf-shadows moving about on it—was more beautiful than what you saw?"

"I should respond that you—excuse me—were a barbarian, and could not tell what I saw."

"But is not what you saw the same thing that you have represented on your canvas? May we not judge by that?"

"It is no good talking of colours to the blind," answered Campbell, with a good-natured laugh. "I see you are heretics all;" and so saying he gathered up his properties and walked away.

Sir Walter would have liked to pursue the subject further, but the presence of Mrs. Campbell stopped him.

"I shall betake myself to the only form of art of which I am capable," said that

lady, producing a sandy piece of satin out of her basket and beginning operations.

The other ladies followed her example, and soon every one was stitching at strangely stiff-backed flowers.

"Five ladies and five high-art cushions," exclaimed Elspeth irreverently, coming into the room. "There is such a monotony about your occupations that I am sure you will be grateful to me for doing something different. I am going to make rabbit-nets, and tie salmon-flies."

But sedentary employment was not much in Elspeth's line; she soon threw aside her silk and feathers, and coming round to Maude, whispered—

"Do slip away presently; I want to show you something upstairs."

At the end of a few minutes she rose and followed her.

Elspeth was in her room, kneeling in

front of a large basket, which contained a white Angora cat and five small kittens.

"I made that crabbed old Mathews bring them up; she thought I meant to paint them, and I didn't undeceive her, or I should never have got them. I am going to put them all in Mr. Donne's bed to-night. Will you help? It will be no end of a lark."

"No, Elspeth, you really must not do anything of the kind. How can you think of going poking about in Mr. Donne's room!"

"Now, don't be tiresome, Maudie," responded the young lady, coaxingly. "You shall help me, for two poking together will be quite proper; and then we will hide ourselves behind the cupboard on the landing outside his door, so as to hear the mewing and spitting of the cat, and Bertie's boots flying all about. Won't it be first-rate?"

"No, indeed, I shan't aid and abet you in any way. I hope you are joking. Do let me take them downstairs."

"You are very cross, Maude; I don't love you a bit. You haven't an atom of fun in you."

Who can stand that reproach? From the child in the nursery, to the literary reviewer, we none of us dare not to see "fun" when we are bidden to look out for it. Whether it is there or not, is a matter of quite secondary importance. Maude, therefore, was silent, though not convinced.

In the afternoon the two girls went out riding, under the escort of Mr. Morpeth and Sir Walter Grenville. Elspeth developed a sudden partiality for the canon, and insisted on riding by his side, so that the other couple had a great deal of each other's society. Maude felt half-apologetic to Sir Walter for her capricious behaviour

on the previous evening, and tried to show her penitence by an unusually gracious demeanour; and the young man, pleased by her friendly manner, was gay and cheerful, and showed to his very best. When the riders returned, about tea-time, they all four reported that they had had a most agreeable afternoon, and their smiling faces made a marked contrast to those of the fishermen, who came in about the same time, with almost empty baskets, and decidedly low spirits. The water had not been "in order." Naturally! When was it ever known to be in order? Unless, in pre-historic England, the rivers were very different to those of the present time, the piscatorial part of the population must often have gone to bed hungry.

That evening a pianist came over from Rotherby, and, with the addition of half a dozen couples or so, who joined them from

the neighbouring houses, the junior members of the party danced in the hall. Of course, where the dancers are so few, the same people must often be partners; at any rate, certain it was that Sir Walter and Maude valsed a great many times together.

"This has been a delightful evening," he said, as the music stopped; "it is a pity that all good things come to an end so soon."

Seeing that a great part of the time had been spent in her company, Maude could not but take this remark as a compliment to herself; and there was something in the speaker's manner that threw more meaning into the words than appeared on their surface. Again and again Elspeth's speech, "Now, don't pretend not to know that he is perfectly bewitched by you," came into her head. She was not a flirt like

Miss Vivian; if she had felt sure that Sir Walter was growing attached to her, she would have felt it her duty to keep him at a distance. Her heart was still sore from recent events, and she had a half-formed resolution that she would never marry. But, then, how could she tell what he was thinking of? Most probably nothing! Could anything be more horrid or unwomanly than to set to work to repress a man who was not making love to her at all? Why should she alienate a friend who was well disposed towards her, and pleasant to talk to? He was certainly not clever, he did not seem to enter into a great many things that interested her, he was not a person who looked "before and after" much (unconsciously Maude was reviewing the qualities that had half charmed her in Eustace Simmonds); but he was genial, and open-hearted, and merry,

and thoroughly trustworthy (now she had come to the list of merits which the other certainly had not); and after all, at his age, one could not expect people to be like grandfathers. He certainly was a very nice boy (Maude's anti-matrimonial theories by no means included the eschewing of all male friendship; and at nineteen girls believe more in Platonic relationships than they do later), and it would be a thousand pities to drop out of acquaintance with him. She would go on just as before, and let things take their chance; most likely no harm would come of it.

Was she quite genuine in arguing thus? Who knows?

Lady Loder, who always spoke out her mind without any reticence, said to her when they were alone, "I think Sir Walter is paying you a great deal of attention, Maudie. Of course you might marry

better, but nowadays so many girls remain single, that he might be worth thinking of. Besides, he is a nice fellow, and that is always something."

But Maude was not on sufficiently confidential terms with her cousin to be willing to discuss the matter. "Oh no," she replied, hypocritically, as if the idea were quite a new one to her. "Why, he scarcely spoke to me all the morning."

"Well, you know best," said Lady Loder, as she dismissed her; and then added mentally, "There is something cold about that girl."

"Something cold about that girl." This was a criticism which was continually being made about Maude by those who did not know her in intimacy. And there was a foundation of truth in the remark. Most women are gifted with great adaptability of character. Where circumstances have

placed them, there they root themselves, and grow attached to those with whom they come in daily contact, and by whom they are kindly treated. There are others who have less pliability of nature; these are not, like the first, happy wherever they are set down; these, too, do not give their love so easily. They may, perhaps, even have passed through childhood with a reputation for being only moderately affectionate sisters and daughters, and their neighbours think them incapable of any great devotion; but let the right hand come, bearing the magic key that unlocks their hearts, and ten to one they will pour out an intensity of love—deep, fervid, unquenchable love—of which the others are incapable. To them, it is true, life is full of risks; they can only develop themselves freely under one set of circumstances, and if their lot is cast on different lines,

they remain dwarfed, stunted, spoilt. From a possible highest, they may stop short at an actual lowest.

Of this latter kind was Maude's nature. The tender, softening influences of her Selby home were gone; gone, too, were her favourite occupations of old days; none of the higher and better chords of her disposition met with any response in Lady Loder's house; her mood towards her aunt's views of life and general principles were almost invariably antagonistic. Christine's companionship did not fill the vacuum in her heart. If this chapter in her life's history were to be indefinitely prolonged, her whole character would be injured, and the promise of a fine womanhood might be blighted.

"Good night," said Elspeth, poking her head round the door, as the clock struck half-past eleven. "You won't change your mind, and come too?"

"No," replied the other. "Please, dear Elspeth, give up your plan; you will only get into a scrape."

Elspeth's answer was maliciously to pinch the tail of one of the kittens, which responded with a feeble squeak, and in another minute her steps were heard retreating down the passage.

Maude sent Mlle. Sophie to bed, and sat down to write a letter to Christine. She had received one from her that morning, describing all the woes she was enduring, and begging for an answer. As they would meet on Saturday it was not worth writing much, but she would send her a few lines. She had just stuck her envelope when suddenly a distant scream was heard, and a series of growls, evidently from some large dog. Maude paused a moment and listened. The scream was repeated, and cries of "Help! help!" "It is some joke

of that tiresome Elspeth's," she thought; and opened her door to hear better. From the end of the gallery she distinctly recognized Elspeth's voice—"Mamma! Clara! help! Oh, I shall be killed!" and then the sound of growls recommenced.

"I dare say it is only some new trick of hers," thought Maude; "but I may just as well go and see."

She stole out of her room, and looked round to see if any one was about. There was no one; but the distant cries were again heard.

"I wonder if there is really anything the matter?" she thought, and hastened her steps a little.

Following the sound, she reached the landing at the end of the passage, and there, to her horror, she saw Elspeth stretched at full length on the ground, whilst over her, with angry eyes and

slowly waving tail, stood Oscar, the big St. Bernard which she had seen tied up in the stable yard.

"Call him off, Maude," said Elspeth, faintly.

"Oscar! Here, good Oscar!" cried Maude, trembling, but in her most propitiatory voice.

Oscar looked round, but stirred not a step.

"Can't you get up?"

The girl moved; but instantly the growls redoubled, accompanied by a little grab in the direction of her throat.

"He will kill me!" said Elspeth, terrified.

"Lie quite still; I'll get somebody."

"The smoking-room is at the end of the passage."

Maude hurried off, guided by a gentle odour of cigars, to the right door.

"Oh, please," she said, opening the door without ceremony, and oblivious of her blue dressing-gown, "come quickly, or Oscar will kill Elspeth Vivian."

"What?" There was a shuffling of chairs, and soon, dressed in various fancy toilettes, quite as decorative as Maude's, all the gentlemen emerged from their retreat, Lord Glamorgan at their head.

"He is on the landing," she said.

Without another word they hastened to the spot, where Elspeth, hearing welcome sounds of approaching rescue, now lay quite still.

"Oscar!" called Lord Glamorgan—"Oscar, come here!"

Oscar looked up and wagged his tail, but did not budge; his face plainly expressed, "See what I have caught for you!" It perfectly beamed with pride.

"Oscar, come off!" repeated his master.

This time the dog unwillingly stirred; but Elspeth moved a moment too soon, and he returned to the spot.

"Pull him off, Rotherby."

And Lord Rotherby passed his hand through his collar, whilst Lord Glamorgan helped the poor girl to get up.

"What were you doing here at this time of night, Miss Vivian?" he asked.

"I was only—only," stammered Elspeth, bursting into tears, between relief and shame—"only waiting, after taking the kittens—putting the kit—tens in Mr. Donne's room, and Oscar came up behind me and knocked me down, and nearly killed me."

"What does she mean?" asked Lord Glamorgan, fairly puzzled.

"It was a joke between her and Mr. Donne," explained Maude. "I think he will find the white cat and her kittens

somewhere in his room. It was nothing but her fun.—Come with me," she said, turning to Elspeth. "You are not hurt, are you? You can walk?"

But now the unwonted noise had roused a great part of the house, and there were heads peeping out of several doors along the passage.

Maude took Elspeth to her room, gave her some sal-volatile, and tried to console her; but the girl had received a great shock to her nerves, and did nothing but sob and cry.

"He was so big and strong, and his eyes were so red and fierce—and every one will laugh so to-morrow. Oh, Maude, I must go home early in the morning; I can't face them all."

"Oh no! don't think any more of it. No one will laugh."

"Who was there?"

"Some of the gentlemen; I really hadn't time to see which."

"Was Mr. Donne with them?"

"Yes."

Redoubled sobs. "He will laugh so."

"Indeed, I don't think he will."

"Why?"

"He was thoroughly frightened; and stood leaning against the wall, as white as a sheet."

"No! did he?" said Elspeth, with great interest, the sobs ceasing as suddenly as a child's. "How funny he must have looked! I can't imagine his brown face white."

"It was, though."

"It was lucky for me that you were still up and heard me call."

"Yes, I am glad I was; otherwise I think Oscar would have kept you prisoner till the gentlemen had done smoking and had come that way."

"Did you see Mrs. Campbell poking her head out of her room, with her fringe rolled up in kid-curlers? I wish all the ladies had come to the rescue instead of the men; we should have had a peep into the secrets of the prison-house."

Elspeth's natural mood was clearly on the return.

"How did Oscar get upstairs, I wonder? I know he is loose in the offices at night, but there are doors between."

"I fancy I let him in myself," replied Miss Vivian. "It all got so lonely that I thought I would open the door at the top of the back stairs, so as to hear more plainly some servants who were still moving about below. I suppose Oscar thought it was too good an opportunity to be lost."

It was with a very shamefaced countenance that Elspeth descended next morning to breakfast; but finding that no one

alluded to her last night's position, she gradually took courage, and rattled away as usual. Lady Loder inquired into the particulars of the adventure from Maude, and Lady Vivian was heard remarking to Captain Hotham, "I think the castle must be full of rats. I heard such a noise outside my room in the early part of the night, that I nearly went out to see what was going on; only then it occurred to me that rats might account for it."

And Captain Hotham responded, with immovable solemnity, "Ah, really! I heard a noise, too; but it didn't strike me that it might be rats. They often swarm in these old houses."

Certainly, with whatever capabilities Lady Vivian was gifted, that of being a vigilant chaperon was not among the number.

One event that happened on that Thurs-

day deserves to be recorded. The scene is the bench under the cedar tree. The time 4.30 p.m. The *dramatis personæ* Elspeth and Mr. Donne. There must be something peculiar in their appearance, for Lady Mappin and Mrs. Morpeth, who are approaching, both stop simultaneously and say, "Shall we take one more turn before going in?"

"Miss Vivian," Mr. Donne is remarking, "I'm an awful duffer at making speeches."

"So you told me on Monday," replies the young lady, with great effrontery.

"And yet I've got something I want to say."

"Down with the headings, then; I'll shape them into form with pleasure. Is that what you want?"

"No," says her companion, rushing blindly on destruction, and plunging every moment more and more wildly into slang,

and grammatical constructions unrecognized by Lindley Murray. "No, it isn't that—it's this;" and he begins tearing a dry cedar cone nervously to pieces, and strewing the chips on the grass. "Look here, Miss Vivian; I've got so awfully fond of you, that I shall be awfully cut up if you won't—won't have me."

This is a form which in his calmer moments he abhors; but at such times people are apt to fall beneath themselves.

"I know I'm not clever, like you; but I would try all I could to make you happy."

The bits of cone crackle more vigorously than before. Elspeth looks almost as doleful as he; in spite of her light way of speaking, she has a tender heart and can't bear giving pain. In her distress she grows nearly as incoherent as Mr. Donne.

"I'm awfully sorry," she stammers. "I didn't know you would take it like that; I was only in fun. No, I can't marry you; I don't care for you that way. Let us talk of something else. Shall you be going to Scotland this year for the grousing?"

They rise and wend their way sadly towards the house, and for the rest of their visit hardly speak to one another.

## CHAPTER III.

"When first I saw your face, a year ago,
I knew my life's good, my soul heard one voice:
'The woman yonder,—there's no use in life
But just to obtain her.'"

E. B. BROWNING.

THAT evening Sir Walter Grenville spent a full hour meditating on his future course of action. He had quite made up his mind that the greatest wish he had in the world was to win Maude for his wife, but how to accomplish his purpose he was in doubt. Should he speak to her before leaving Glaston? One argument in favour of so doing was that when back in London he would never find so good an opportunity; for all the ease of social

intercourse in the country would be gone, and he would only see her in her cousin's drawing-room, or at some crowded party. But when he tried to estimate his chances of success, he felt all astray. Certainly she never avoided him, and always seemed pleased to speak to him; still, this might arise from nothing more than a feeling of kindliness towards him, as a friend whom she liked. On the other hand, he had noticed several times, that the perfectly open, sisterly, unabashed manner with which she had been wont to treat him, had changed; she had grown much more reserved about her own mood of life; she could no longer be induced to discuss his occupations at Shustone, and suggest alleviations for the loneliness of which he had several times complained; indeed, once or twice she had manifestly turned the subject. She never now asked him to

execute small commissions for her at Selby, as she had done on several occasions, in the earlier part of their acquaintance, when she seemed to have been conscious of none of the scruples which now beset her, about "giving him trouble." Was this change due to any estrangement that had crept between them, or was it an alteration consequent upon a new phase of feeling that was arising in her heart, and transforming their relations? The whole thing turned on that, and the answer was quite uncertain. Then there were those reports that he had heard in London about some entanglement between her and Eustace Simmonds. True, he did not put much faith in them: what possible attraction, he asked himself, could Simmonds have for a girl like Maude? Still, as with innate gentleman-like feeling, he never mentioned his name, and she never

alluded to him, he had no real foundation for an opinion which certainly ran counter to the current gossip of London. He could not decide upon any plan of operations; and finally concluded to try and make an opportunity for a confidential chat on the morrow, and then be guided by circumstances.

All the morning it rained hopelessly. The high-art cushions advanced with rapid strides, and the party within shared the depression of the barometer. In the afternoon the downpour mitigated itself into a drizzle. Some of the gentlemen, accompanied by Elspeth, whom no weather could daunt, undertook a four miles' walk to a farm celebrated for its prize stock. The elder ladies voted that it was too wet to leave the house. Mrs. Campbell would have ventured out, but just in time remembered that the red plush hood of her

ulster would suffer from the damp; and the only walkers who appeared for the "mouthful of fresh air," which was considered indispensable by the younger ladies, were Maude, Clara Vivian, Mr. Gosford, and Sir Walter Grenville.

Ever since the bow-meeting, Mr. Gosford had been smelling his "alkaram" and declaring he had a dreadful cold in his head, and if it had not been for fears concerning his digestion, he would certainly not have ventured out on such a day.

"Had you not better put on your galoshes?" asked Miss Vivian with solicitude. She had quite given up Sir Walter, and was just keeping her hand in with Mr. Gosford. Mr. Gosford rather liked her attentions.

"Thank you for your kind thought. I think I will take your advice," he re-

plied; "it must be terribly wet underfoot."

The lodge at the end of the park was the proposed goal; but when about half the distance was accomplished the rain began to fall faster, and Mr. Gosford grew alarmed about his throat.

"I think I shall go home; I am afraid of this damp."

"So am I," said Clara, coughing; "I will go with you."

Maude prepared to turn homewards, but Sir Walter said—

"Why should we shorten our walk, Miss Loder? You haven't half earned your tea; let us go as far as the lodge." And Maude allowed herself to be persuaded, and went.

The rain ran in streams off Walter's hat; the wind fought with Maude's umbrella, and at times nearly proved victor;

but to the young and the strong there is pleasure in combating the elements, and they trudged contentedly along the drive.

"I think I ought to confess a theft I committed yesterday," he said presently.

"What have you stolen?" asked Maude.

"You left a packet of photos on the table," he said, "and I couldn't resist taking one. Will you forgive me, and let me keep my spoils?"

"I do not think I can make you out to be the most distant of cousins," she replied, "and I generally only give my photo to relations."

"No distant cousin could value it more than I should, however," he said softly.

Maude was ashamed to make a fuss about such a trifle.

"Well, don't put it in your book," she said. "If you won't do that you may keep it."

"I had not the slightest intention of putting it in my book," he said.

Maude felt she had made matters ten times worse by this stipulation, but she could not explain.

"I want to ask your forgiveness," he resumed, "for the rough way I spoke to you at the archery meeting about your philanthropic efforts in London. I had no right to interfere—I know that—but I was taken aback at the thought of the danger you had run."

"I quite understood," she said hurriedly. "I was very much obliged for your advice, and for your interest."

"Interest!" he exclaimed passionately. "It is not interest; that is no word to describe my feeling for you. Let me tell you what I really——"

But here Maude interrupted him suddenly. A miserable sensation came over

her as if she had lived through this scene once before this year. She could not, would not, go through it again to its bitter end.

"I am tired," she said. "Let us turn back; I do not want to go any further."

Her companion turned at once.

"Do not stop me," he entreated; "hear what I want to say."

"No, please—please stop!" she said excitedly. "I don't want to hear anything about anybody's feelings. Let us talk of anything in the world beside that. The weather is a much more interesting subject, especially when it rains as it does now. Did you ever see anything like it! Really, if I get home dry I ought to send a letter of acknowledgment to Ulster House, to appear ever after in their advertisements." She knew she was talking nonsense, but she would not pause.

Walter felt it was clear that there was no use in saying anything more, so he walked along in silence; and the wind howled among the big oaks, and their footsteps splashed along on the wet drive, uninterrupted by any other sound.

As they neared the door, Sir Walter said in a quiet, determined voice—

"I think you were hardly fair on me just now, Miss Loder; you might have listened to what I had to say; a man has surely a right to that much notice. But the day shall come when you shall hear—yes, and answer me too!"

His face was grave, and his mouth firmly set, as he turned the large handle and stood aside to let her pass. Maude did not look at him or speak, but rushed past him, and ran straight up to her own room.

Her heart was beating tumultuously. Never had she spent a more distressing,

disturbing half-hour. She knew now that she had made a great mistake in interrupting what Sir Walter had begun to say. If the worst had come to the worst, and he had asked her to be his wife, of course she must have refused him; but she might have done it so tenderly, so kindly, that they might have parted on a much less unsatisfactory footing than that which now existed between them. His companionship had come to be more to her than she knew, and although she was quite honest in saying to herself that she had no wish to marry him, yet she felt that life would be more blank, now that she would feel bound to avoid his society. And avoid him she must, for after what he had said as they stood together in the portico, to allow any continuance of intimacy would be simply to deceive him. It could not fail to be misinterpreted.

On the other hand, was there no possibility that, by dismissing him for good and all, she might be putting away the chance of a life that might be a happy one? She liked Sir Walter very much; he was kind and strong and good; and though, at the beginning of their acquaintance, she had looked upon him as a mere boy, there had lately been less of this feeling of superior age on her part, though she had kept up the idea to herself as a convenient fiction. When he remonstrated with her as to her imprudences in Paradise Row, she had seen that there was manly decision beneath that easy-going manner; and again to-day, as he spoke to her before they parted, there was nothing boyish in his clear, firmly spoken words.

It is curious what a power manly rebukes have in drawing a woman towards the bestower; so long, that is, as he

possesses no authority over her. It is among the most mysterious workings of Providence, that post-matrimonial scoldings, which are nearly always to be had in plenty, should be so devoid of charm. No wonder men are often a little disappointed when they find how thanklessly they are received. But Maude was in the stage when such reproofs still possess an infinite attraction, and to this attraction she was nowise insensible.

Yet after a moment she turned aside from the idea. She knew that, though she liked Sir Walter, the feeling she had had for Eustace Simmonds had been more nearly akin to love than anything that she felt for him; and though that other liking was past and over for ever, it had none the less left its traces, and she felt that if she engaged herself to Walter Grenville, she would only be trying to salve over an old

wound by accepting an offer of affection which she could not reciprocate. "I could not do it for my own sake," she said to herself, "and it would be harder still on him. I will never marry; that will be best for everybody."

Whilst she was sitting in her soaking clothes in her bedroom, Sir Walter was standing mournfully by the empty hearth in the hall, overwhelming himself with reproaches. Why had he not waited? how could he expect anything better after so slight an acquaintance? why, having once begun, had he not insisted that she should hear him? why, having allowed her to cut short his declaration, had he made that stupid allusion to the future? Of course, now she would feel bound to keep him at a distance, whereas, had he said nothing, she would have no doubt thought that he had withdrawn his pretensions, and would have

assiduously tried to bury the past in oblivion. As things stood, he was in an utterly false position. Suddenly it struck him that his best course was to explain the state of the case to Lady Loder. She, he was fairly sure, would befriend him—at least, so far as to give him easy access to the house—and he must trust to himself for the rest.

Happily for himself, he found her sitting alone in the morning-room. "Lady Loder," he said, "may I come in? I want to talk to you. Perhaps you have guessed my wishes with regard to your cousin?"

"Yes;" and Lady Loder nodded encouragingly. She had seen enough to make her feel sure that she understood rightly both his question, and his agitated manner. "He has proposed to her, but I wonder what answer she gave?" she said to herself.

"I wanted to tell her what I felt towards her, but she would not listen. I don't give up hope; I shall try again later on—with your leave, that is. Will you let me come to your house as if nothing had happened? That will give me my best chance."

"Of course—of course," replied Lady Loder. "She would not listen to you? What an odd girl she is! Still, I think she likes you; I should say you were one of her chief friends, and I am sure there is no one else in the way. You had better pay no attention to what is past, and just go on as usual. I should be very pleased that Maude should marry you; I think you would make her a good husband. Courage!" she went on, feeling a sudden movement of compassion as she looked at his downcast countenance. "You would not be the only man who has been refused

the first time of asking, and had a very different answer the second time."

"Thank you," he said, still in a very melancholy tone. "You are always kind to me."

The dinner-party that evening was not a very lively affair. Some of the party were ill, some were gloomy and indisposed for much talk, and others were badly placed, so that their talents were lost to society. Sir Walter and Maude were both silent; Mr. Donne was no less so; Lady Vivian was suffering from a bad attack of neuralgia; Mr. Gosford, having caught a fresh chill, was sitting with his head wrapped in flannel, drinking treacle-posset in his room; and Elspeth, who would have been equal to any emergency, had been taken to dinner by Sir Walter, who had placed her next Mr. Donne, so that there was no one, on either side, to respond to her lively remarks.

The hours that intervened between dinner and bedtime were spent in an equally depressed condition, and next morning Lord Glamorgan's guests took their departure, with the usual number of thanks, compliments, and appointments for meeting again, which it was more than likely they would speedily do, seeing that they were, most of them, returning to London.

## CHAPTER IV.

"Distance sometimes endears friendship, and absence sweeteneth it."—HOWELL.

THE brougham had hardly set Lady Loder and Maude down in Hertford Street, when Christine drove up in a cab. She had kept to her resolution of leaving by the first train, and she had ended her long journey from Falconbridge, at the same time at which the others had completed their much shorter one from Rotherby. She threw herself into Maude's arms.

"Oh dear! how very, very glad I am to be home again! Aren't you, Maude?"

And Maude fervently responded, "Yes, delighted."

A little parcel awaited Christine, which,

when opened, proved to contain six beautifully embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs, trimmed with the finest valenciennes.

"What lovely handkerchiefs!" exclaimed the fair recipient, radiant with pleasure; for some finery above her means still rejoiced her heart as much as ever. "Who can they be from? Ah! here is a note at the bottom."

It was written on a sheet of scented violet paper, which, by dint of numerous mysterious contortions, formed its own complete and inviolable envelope. A huge "P. M." in raised gold letters entwined each other in the corner, and the pages were written over in a large, feeble, pointed hand.

"Southbourne Terrace, Friday.

"My dear Miss Ransome,

"I send you a small remembrance, which please accept from me. They come

from Madame Ferronière's at Paris, so I hope they are all right. I have had them marked with a 'C.' only, because that is the name which will stick by you whatever happens to the other.

"To-morrow you will be back again. You don't know what an awfully dull time I have had since you left. I stopped two days with the Beeches, but found it very slow. Do come here soon.

"Yours very sincerely,

PETER MENTEITH."

"They are quite wonderful, Christine!" exclaimed Lady Loder. "You are not half impressed with them. I don't know that I ever saw such cambric;" and she held it admiringly up to the light.

Princesses in disguise no longer reveal themselves by detecting a pea beneath their ten mattresses, but by possessing a

special critical faculty with regard to cambric, an intuitive knowledge of the "Peerage," an appreciation of the custards in *soupe à la royale*, a capacity for sitting up every night till past eleven without experiencing that weariness of mind and body which overtakes humbler mortals. Lady Loder was fairly perfect in these respects, but in many of them Christine was still lamentably deficient.

"Really, I should like to see this hero of yours," she went on. "London is still empty; suppose you ask him from me to come to tea on Tuesday. He will not run against any one else."

"You will not like him at all, Lady Loder. I assure you you had better not invite him; and he will be sure to call again."

"Never mind; I have a great wish to see him. Ask him for Tuesday."

So Christine wrote:—

"Hertford Street, Saturday.

"DEAR MR. MENTEITH,

"Very many thanks for your present. The handkerchiefs are quite beautiful, and Lady Loder admires them even more than I do." (This was meant to infuse a little acid into her gratitude.) "She desires me to say she should be very glad to see you, if you liked to come to tea on Tuesday, but" ("Now, what can I add to prevent his coming?") "I think that is the day on which you go to play tennis at Lord's; if so, pray don't put off your game. I dare say I shall be calling on Mrs. Menteith before the end of the week.

"Yours truly,

"CHRISTINE RANSOME."

"Well, Christine," asked Maude, when they were alone together upstairs, "were

you not more pleased than you expected, to be with your own people again, in spite of the drawbacks you mentioned in your letter?"

"Would you like to see some of my people?" was Christine's answer, taking a photograph out of her bag. There, in the light violet silk, sat Mrs. Ransome, holding a large book—presumably in order to indicate her absorption in literature; there, on two stools at her feet, sat Sophy gazing at a miniature, and Hester brandishing a fan with gigantic ropes and tassels. The light had fallen on Sophy's right ear, and made it look like an oyster-shell fixed on at right angles to her head. Here was an explanation of the indifference to her relations, which Maude had always regarded as a puzzlingly unamiable trait in her friend's character. If they were like this, who could wonder?

"Oh, Christine!" in an awestruck whisper. This was all she could bring herself to say at first, but recollecting that this ejaculation was perhaps not very polite, she made an effort and added, "They are not very pretty, but still I dare say they are very nice and kind and affectionate, and that makes up for anything else."

"Affectionate!" repeated Christine, contemptuously. "You wouldn't say that if you could hear us quarrelling. But let us talk of pleasanter things. Tell me all about your visit."

So the two girls settled themselves for a good talk, and Maude described all her experiences of the past week—except one—and heard as many more from Christine.

After church on the following day Maude and Christine walked down to Lower Belgrave Street to call upon Effie, and found her and Maurice and Edward

just returned from a long and futile expedition in search of ecclesiastical dissipation.

"I am so cross, it is dangerous to come near me," said Mrs. Carew. "It really seems to be a token that Providence regards the institution of parishes with special favour, that whenever one leaves one's own church, and makes a huge effort to hear some great preacher, not the great preacher, but the great preacher's very small curate, should hold forth for three-quarters of an hour; and when I grumbled, Maurice actually quoted that dreadful old remark of George Herbert's, about patience and the text. Now come and put me into a good humour with a great many amusing stories of your doings."

Maude, anxious to spare Christine, began an account of her visit; and Christine gave a few details of her tennis-party and her journey back to London.

"The weather was most enjoyable at Falconbridge," she said with an expressive sigh; and Mr. Carew, who was in the secret of her domestic annoyances, felt how intolerable it was to think that so lovely a creature had a home where evidently the only thing that could be enjoyed was the fine weather.

"How she makes the best of everything!" he said to himself with admiration.

"You will stay to luncheon?" said Effie; and even after luncheon the party showed no inclination to break up.

Edward and Christine retired to the back drawing-room, and conversed there apart. The young lady was entering into further details concerning the past week than she had granted to the general company, and was confessing, with an affecting degree of remorse, that she had made her sister Sophy cry, by forgetting herself, and

speaking sharply to her for opening a letter addressed to some one else. The facts were not absolutely accurate, but probably as nearly so as those of many stories which we tell and hear; and Edward could only feel touched and gratified, at the amount of self-reproach which she heaped on herself for this comparatively small transgression. If his good advice had resulted in such patience and self-command under difficulties, that this was the worst error into which she had fallen, during the inside a whole week, what a gentle, guidable nature she must possess, and how easily she would be influenced for good! He could hardly bring himself to speak with the sternness which his office of mentor required, of this very venial sin, and was greatly relieved when duty allowed him to come to the encouraging part of his discourse.

Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. Carew sat and talked with Maude in the front room.

"Wasn't it vexatious having to endure that curate?" Effie said. "He was an especially aggravating specimen of his race. I think he had curled his hair with irons; and he preached about secondary motives, and abused them all indiscriminately. I could hardly sit still. I have the warmest love and admiration for secondary motives."

"I must say I prefer the highest," said Maude. "Why shouldn't one do right from them?"

"I don't want the lower motives instead of the higher; I want them as well. Seeing how hard it is to do right here below, why are we to get rid of any assistance we can have? Mr. Cunliffe spoke with admiration of people who, if a low motive occurred to them as an

additional reason for doing a good thing they had determined upon, stop short and leave it undone."

"I can quite understand their doing so, but I am sure they are not right."

"I should think not," answered Effie, energetically. "Why are we to lose the help of everything that is less good than the best? Would you turn out all the coloured soldiers from our Indian army? They are not so reliable or so useful as the white men, but they back them up capitally."

"They need careful using," observed her husband, "and unremitting recollection that they are merely inferior allies. Our dark friends were very nearly being too much for us in the Mutiny, if you remember, Effie. They are 'good servants, but bad masters.'"

"They were mismanaged, then. But

the proof that we can't do without them, is that we enlist them now just as we did before the Mutiny. Of course, it is folly to expect from them more than they are likely to do; and I quite grant you that with regard to the secondary motives. But suppose, for example, that a man has got into the way of muddling himself with brandies and sodas, and has not enough resolution to reform, from the highest motive, you would rather he went on muddling himself, than give it up, assisted by the consideration, that, if the girl he is in love with saw him in that state, his whole chance with her would be gone?"

"You really are too impetuous in your conclusions, Effie," said Maurice, laughing; "I must really disclaim holding any such views."

"But you defend Mr. Cunliffe, who implied it."

"I don't remember doing so; but, at any rate, let me make my peace by suggesting another argument on your side of the question."

"What is that?"

"Secondary motives, used on the right side, help to form a habit of right action; and it is much easier to raise one's motive for doing well, than to change one's habit of doing ill. Just as a sailor, accustomed to running up and down the rigging, would be more capable of saving a person from the upper-storey of a burning house, than a landsman who had never climbed high in his life."

"Yes, there is that to be said in addition. I wonder, too, what Mr. Cunliffe would make of the parable about sitting down in the lowest place, in order to be moved up higher? There is an appeal to anything but a noble motive."

"And besides," said Maude, "the promise of heaven, which is over and over again suggested in the Bible as an inducement to well-doing, is itself only a secondary motive."

"In fact, we have all possible arguments, secular and sacred, on our side," said Maurice, provokingly, "and nothing but the maunderings of a curate on the other."

"Now you are laughing at me, Maurice."

"No; I am admiring your superhuman energy."

Certainly Effie, in becoming Mrs. Carew, had given a fresh example of the rule that people very seldom marry their likes, but generally their opposites. She was an active-minded, impetuous woman, who had an irresistible longing always to know the why and wherefore of everything, and to push all her theories to what she thought their legitimate conclusions.

Mr. Carew was reticent to a fault; he had his views on most matters, but he never bubbled up to discuss and defend them, as did his wife; nor did he always care to consider what they would lead to in this or that direction, if carried to extremes.

Yet, in spite of this diversity of character, they got on extremely well together. He admired her impulsiveness, and the keen interest which different subjects aroused in her, though at the same time he sometimes laughed at her for her vehemence; and she found a sort of rest in his quieter nature, and valued his high principles and solid excellence, and forgave his want of zeal for getting to the bottom of everything, in consideration of the repose which its absence supplied: in the same way as a botanist who cultivated a garden chiefly in order to pull the flowers up and

examine their roots, and pick them to pieces, and classify and dry them, would admire a neighbouring garden, where the flowers grew to perfection, untouched by the hand of the scientific explorer.

"Before you go, I want to show you the curtains in my bedroom," said Effie. "They have come at last, and are, I think, very successful."

They went upstairs and examined them; and then Mrs. Carew said, as she gave Maude a little caress—

"Have you really been feeling well and happy, and enjoying your visit?"

To which Maude replied, "Yes, very much, till something dreadful happened."

"What was that?" asked Mrs. Carew, alarmed.

"Sir Walter Grenville——" She hesitated, and looked down.

"Does he want to marry you?"

"I wouldn't listen to what he began to say, but I suppose it was going to be that. You are not to tell any one what I have said, Effie. Neither Cousin Mary nor Christine have any idea of it; in fact, you are quite the only person to whom I mention that sort of thing."

"Of course I shall not tell anybody. But how does it stand between you?"

"He says he shall talk about it again some day, whether I like it or no," answered Maude, smiling with rather a watery smile. "We were such good friends, and got on so capitally together at Glaston, till he begun this. Isn't it a pity he thought of it?"

"Indeed it is," responded her friend—"very unfortunate." This, by the way, was most hypocritical of Mrs. Carew; for inwardly she was thinking, "The very thing. We must bring it about in a little time."

"And as Cousin Mary knows nothing about it," continued Maude, "of course she will go on asking him just as usual. It will be very inconvenient."

"Oh no," responded Mrs. Carew; "he will guess that you have not told her; and, after all, why should you quarrel with an old friend, and your next-door neighbour at Selby? Very likely, too, he may take what you said as an answer, and not bother you any more."

But even this encouraging view of the case did not seem to restore Maude's equanimity, and she remained silent, with a troubled expression on her face.

On returning to the drawing-room, they found that the blind and unsuspecting Maurice had, with manly obtuseness, precipitated himself into the midst of the interesting *tête-à-tête* in the back room; and the trio were now discussing the

electric light on the Embankment, about which Christine and Edward seemed to have surprisingly few ideas to impart.

"Should you be in about tea-time on Tuesday, if I called?" Mr. Carew said in a low voice, as the two girls went away.

"Oh no!—at least, we shall be at home; but Peter Menteith is coming that day. Will you look in on Wednesday?" and, with a rosy blush, away she ran.

What did this remark mean? Was Peter's star in the ascendant, and was he being kept out of the way of his more fortunate rival; or—and his heart beat fast at the thought—did Miss Ransome wish to see him on a day when she could talk to him, without being obliged to divide her attention with some one else? It surely was something new that Peter should be admitted in Hertford Street:

that looked ill. But, then, there had been an almost imperceptible expression of disgust in Christine's voice as she announced his impending visit: that looked decidedly well. Perhaps Effie would be able to explain the state of the case to him.

Precisely at five o'clock on Tuesday, Mr. Peter Menteith walked into Lady Loder's drawing-room. There was a manifest struggle going on between his shyness and his self-assertion. If the first should win, he would sit down and tap the end of his boot with his cane, and answer in monosyllables, and beat a retreat at the earliest opportunity; if the last should prove conqueror, he would probably converse freely in his gayest vein of humour. At present, however, it was even odds between the two.

"How do you do, Mr. Menteith?" said

Lady Loder. "Come and sit here, and let me give you a cup of tea."

Peter seated himself in silence upon the very edge of his chair, and gave a preliminary tap to his boot.

"Do you like cream and sugar?"

"Cream, if you please; but I never take sugar."

"I need hardly have asked you," said Lady Loder, cheerfully; "so very few of you young people do now."

"No," replied the visitor; "not many, I think."

This was very uphill work. Lady Loder again put her shoulder to the wheel.

"I hope Mrs. Menteith is well? Has she been out of town this Whitsuntide?"

"No, she hasn't been anywhere."

"Your country place is too far off to be worth going to for so short a time, I suppose?"

"Between five and six hours by express."

"Really, that is quite a long journey in these days when we are all spoilt by railroads."

"I went down to Hertfordshire from Tuesday to Friday."

"Thank goodness!" thought Lady Loder. "He has originated a remark at last!"

"Did you?" she said. "Whereabouts were you staying?"

"At Elmhurst, with the Beeches. I tell them the place ought to be called Beechhurst instead of Elmhurst. Why alter the timber? Ha—ha!" and Peter laughed loudly at his own joke. "Do you know the Beeches, Lady Loder?"

"No, I do not think I have ever met them. Is Elmhurst a pretty place?"

"It's an awfully fine place; and they've

a very pretty daughter. Miss Christine there knows all about Miss Esmé Beech;" and Peter gave something not very far removed from a wink, in the direction of Miss Ransome. The battle was fought and won; self-assertion had gained the day. His spirits were rising with frightful rapidity. He had put down his cane, and was eyeing the furniture and ornaments, and estimating their cost. "I won't offer you the sugar, Miss Loder," he remarked playfully, as he handed her a cup of tea; "it's nasty stuff; bad for the teeth."

"It was very kind of Mrs. Menteith to take so many tickets for the concert in aid of the Cripple's Home. Did she go to it?"

"Yes; and she said it was a first-rate good one. She killed three birds with one stone that way—patronized art, obliged a

friend, and got a real musical treat into the bargain."

"Are you fond of music yourself?" asked Maude.

"Not so very," he replied; "it makes such a noise, and goes on so long. I don't mind a glee or a comic song. However, I know it is right to patronize it. We have got up a madrigal society at Wollaston."

"Is that your country place?"

"Yes. The governor bought it when Lord Wollaston went bankrupt. Every gentleman ought to have a country seat; don't you think so, Lady Loder?" (Christine shuddered; this was the subject of all others upon which Peter was most dreadful.) "We have put up no end of glass. Miss Ransome has had a sniff of the flowers sometimes;" and he laughed patronizingly.

"Yes," said Lady Loder, "and so have I.

Your last bouquet was in the vase on that little velvet table, four whole days, I think."

"That wasn't exactly what it was intended for," said Peter, bluntly; "but I'd be happy to send you some for yourself, Lady Loder."

"Very many thanks," she returned; "I will not refuse so pleasant an offer."

"If you are fond of flowers," he went on, "should you like me to get you tickets for the shows? Botanical?—horticultural? The governor has friends at court in both. You might give his name at the entrance; that would be almost enough; or, still better, I might call, and take you in with me." This climax was put with great enthusiasm.

Lady Loder could hardly help laughing as she thought of herself and the two girls, inspecting the roses at the Botanical

Gardens under the escort of Mr. Peter Menteith. "Thank you," she said, "but we have tickets for both places. What beautiful handkerchiefs those were that you sent Christine last week! I don't know when I have seen such cambric."

"Glad you liked them." Peter's speech was always curiously full of ellipses. "I think they weren't bad. That is the use of being, as it were, related to a young lady." (Christine murmured under her breath, "You're not related to me.") "You can lay such little offerings at her feet. I wish I were related to you, Miss Loder. Perhaps you would like some, too? Would you, now? I should be only too glad."

"Oh no, thank you," said Maude, endeavouring to conceal her disgust; "I have just bought myself a new set."

"Well, I wouldn't lose such a chance if I was you. Last year Admiral Sir

James Swainson, (he's my godfather, you know) offered me a pair of guns; and I refused them, having just set myself up for the season; and then—hang it!—didn't one of mine go and burst up, not a fortnight later. 'Now, you take note,' says I to myself, 'and don't be such a fool as to decline anything you can get for the future.'"

"Quite right," said Lady Loder.

"Miss Ransome," remarked Peter, "are you coming to our next 'at home'? If you don't, I shan't stay in for it. My! what a set of old ladies do come together; and there they sit and grin at one another and say nothing. What pleasure they find in it I can't think."

"You are very satirical," said Lady Loder, mischievously, drawing him out; "and very hard on poor Society: you can't expect every one to be so full of talk

as yourself. But do describe to us the kind of party you would have."

"Oh, something less stiff," he said, expanding under the compliments of his hostess. "If the young men might smoke, now, perhaps they'd come: you can't have a party without them, you know. And then you might provide some champagne cup, too; only I expect, if you did, all the girls would be after a sip of it too—eh, Miss Loder?" and Peter chuckled to himself at the idea. "Shall I get my mother to begin, and set the fashion? Tell me, though, Miss Christine; how did your visit home go off? We had a little tiff, she and I, Lady Loder, about that visit; but we are all the better friends now, ain't we? And how did you like it?"

"Immensely," replied Christine, emphatically. "Papa and mamma and the girls were all so glad to see me; they would hardly let me go."

Maude could hardly believe her ears. Could anything be in flatter contradiction to the account she herself had received from her friend, of the same visit? What purpose could Christine have in so perverting the truth; and how could she permit herself so to pervert it for any purpose? Maude had not realized that when a person is always acting a part, now conforming to some imaginary estimate of herself, which she presumes to exist in her companion's mind, now diverging from it in order to startle him; curious inconsistencies of speech and action inevitably arise.

"Did you find them all well and prosperous, and that things were——"

"Yes, thank you, quite well," interrupted Christine, scarlet with terror as to what revelations were impending.

"I should like to be introduced to

them," he observed. "Perhaps some day we may become better acquainted; though, after what has come and gone, I cannot feel that we are strangers."

This was more than could be borne. "I am rather tired; I think I will go upstairs and rest. Good-bye;" and so saying, she rose and left the room.

"A high and mighty young lady that," remarked Mr. Menteith; "but she will tame down in time—eh? Don't you think so? I like to see them with a spirit. She is lucky in having such a companion as you, Miss Loder," continued the young man, edging a little nearer to Maude.

"At any rate, it is very pleasant for me to have her," responded Maude, graciously.

"I dare say," he said, lowering his voice. "Of course, old ladies are very

well, but the girls get on better with one another."

"Tell me something more about Miss Esmé Beech," said Lady Loder, who, as no one else was there, and as she intended this visit should be the first and last which Mr. Menteith should pay at her house, was disposed to get as much amusement out of him as possible. "Is she fair or dark?"

"Fair; in fact, as Miss Christine is not here (for I always use Esmé to keep *her* in order), she is a leetle bit washed out. Still, she is a good-looking girl, and has thirty thousand pounds down, and more to come. Her mother is always asking me there, and I don't mind going; but, of course, I see what I see."

"No doubt—no doubt; Mrs. Beech would not find it easy to blind you. And does the young lady receive you graciously?"

"I believe you! She hates lawn tennis, but she'll play with me by the hour; and she doesn't like the smell of tobacco, but she's ready enough to roll cigarettes for me, and sit by me whilst I smoke them, too. Now, I doubt if Miss Ransome would."

"Probably not."

"I say, Lady Loder, when the season's over, I wish you would pay us a visit at Wollaston. Won't you, now? And bring Miss Christine and Miss Loder? If I tell my mother you're coming, she'd be glad to see you; I know she would. And we've some things worth showing you down there; I'm sure you'd like it. Do come, will you?"

But this was more than Lady Loder was prepared for. "Thank you," she said, rather stiffly; "I am afraid I cannot do that. I am going to spend the summer

months at Miss Loder's place—Selby; and that is quite in the opposite direction."

For some time longer Peter remained talking in the same strain, till Lady Loder began to wonder when he was going away. At last he rose, and took his departure, saying, "Good-bye, Lady Loder; I'm glad I've found my way here. If ever you want any extra tickets for the rose shows or anything, remember ours are yours to command."

"Well, Maudie!" ejaculated Lady Loder, as soon as the door was well closed. "So that is Christine's hero! I never saw such a dreadful being before."

"He is not attractive, certainly," replied Maude; "but I don't think Christine means to have anything to do with him. The liking is all on one side."

"What a pity he is not different! It would have been such a nice marriage for her."

"Yes, it is a pity; but as he is what he is, I hope and believe it will not come off."

"No. How terrible he was about Miss Esmé Beech!"

"Oh, he is terrible all over; I knew you would be horrified when you saw him."

Christine had retired upstairs in high dudgeon, and was not consoled till a few minutes' inspection of her face, in various attitudes before the glass, had convinced her that indignation was very becoming; and that the heightened colour on her cheeks, and the curl of scorn on her lips, made a very effective expression. She dawdled about in her room, contemplating herself with infinite satisfaction, first in the large cheval glass, and then in the glass that stood on her dressing-table, and noticing with pleasure that, as in the

latter the reflection of a white handkerchief assumed a greenish tinge, her own complexion too must be slightly discoloured by it, and must in realty be even more brilliant than it appeared to her. This was an interesting discovery, and she proceeded to test the other mirrors in the room in the same manner. Clearly her face was fairer than she had any idea of; in every one, the handkerchief lost something of its pure whiteness. She was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"A letter, miss."

She took it from the footman, and opening it, read as follows:—

"Falconbridge.

"MY DEAR CHRISTINE,

"Madame Laure has charged five shillings more for my last bonnet than was agreed upon; and, though I have re-

monstrated, she will not take them off the bill. Should you mind going to her, and saying that I absolutely refuse to pay more than I arranged to give? Seeing that the feathers are my own, I think twenty-five shillings are quite enough, and I will not go a penny beyond. Please make this clear.

"I have heard this morning from my niece, Ada Gresham, that all the children have the measles at Worthing. I hope Charlie will be none the worse. His chest is delicate, and measles always brings a cough. By-the-by, she told me another piece of news. Your friend Edward Carew has been, as I told you he probably was, engaged for ever so long to some very pretty nice girl, and he told Gresham he is going to be married before he settles himself in his new living.

"My niece Emma has been appointed

maid of honour, which is very satisfactory; as Gresham is a poor man, considering the size of the places he has to keep up.

"I shall be very much obliged if you will see about Madame Laure's bill as soon as possible.

"Yours affectionately,

"ESTHER HANWAY."

Miss Ransome had been reading her letter without other emotion than a slight irritability at having to go and make rude speeches about some one else's bonnet, at an unknown shop, when she came to the name of Edward Carew. Then she started and read faster, and a bright blush, succeeded by a sudden pallor, came over her face. She could not restrain a little cry. Edward Carew engaged to be married? Impossible! But apparently he had said so himself. The girl's whole soul seemed

all in a moment filled with a bitter grief. All she had built on, all she had hoped, all she had dreamt of, was to turn to dust and ashes. What could life have in store for her? She had given her heart over into Edward's keeping; loving, trusting, admiring, leaning upon him; and now——? She would have to congratulate him on his approaching marriage, make acquaintance with the bride, perhaps be present at the wedding, whilst all the time her whole being was torn with sorrow. She could not believe it. She looked again at her letter. Perhaps it was an empty report: were not reports proverbially false? There the words stood—"he told Gresham"—— The poor girl's feelings overpowered her; she rushed to the door, and turned the key, and then sat down, and cried with floods of tears.

"Tears—idle tears," for never were tears

more idle than on this occasion. Lady Esther Hanway's story, circumstantial and authentic as it appeared, had arisen thus. Lord Gresham had been looking over the repairs going on at the rectory, in company with Mr. Carew, and had observed to him, "When you are established here, you will want nothing more but a nice pretty wife to keep house for you."

And Edward had replied, "Wait a bit; who knows but the nice pretty wife may be forthcoming in time?" and as he spoke the wavy, rippling fair hair, the long-lashed eyes, the rosy mouth, and the enchanting dimples of Miss Christine Ransome, had hovered before him.

On going home, Lord Gresham had said to his wife, "I suppose our new rector is engaged to be married; indeed, he said nearly as much to-day. I believe the young lady is pretty and charming."

Shortly after, Lady Gresham had written to her aunt, Lady Esther, and had remarked in the course of her letter, "Gresham says Mr. Carew tells him he is engaged to be married. I am glad of it, for a woman is a great help among the cottagers. I hope she will be an acquisition: I hear she is very pretty and charming. I suppose the wedding will be soon."

Nobody could be charged with any great inaccuracy in retailing this story, yet the effect on poor Christine we have already seen. When she had finished her crying fit, she took one more look at the letter, the words of which seemed to be already burnt into her brain, and then tore it into a thousand pieces.

"He is a traitor!" she said. "I am sure, seeing how men flirt with girls, that girls need have no compunction about taking them in. I mean to have my turn;" and

so, vowing vengeance upon the male sex, she descended to the drawing-room.

"Your friend Peter stayed a long time, Christine," said Lady Loder, unsuspectingly, "and he became wonderfully communicative. I don't like him at all; he is quite horrid. I shall certainly forbid the banns."

"Wait till they are put up," responded Christine, with uncontrolled irritation.

Clearly misfortune did not agree with Miss Ransome's temper. Both Maude and Lady Loder looked up with extreme surprise. At Falconbridge such a remark would have passed comparatively unobserved, but this was the first time that the girl's sharp tongue had made itself felt by her London friends. Perhaps it was merely that Christine disliked having jokes made about her admirer. Willing to conciliate her, Maude changed the subject.

"Have you finished the strip of work for your chimney-piece?" she asked.

"No, no, no!" said her cousin. "I wonder how many times you are going to ask me about that border? Finish it yourself, if you are in such a hurry for it."

"Is anything the matter, Christine?" inquired Lady Loder; "are you not feeling well? Have you a headache?"

"No," answered she, very shortly; and seeing that she would not speak civilly they let her alone.

The same mood lasted all the evening. Thinking she must be really ill, Lady Loder said, as half-past ten struck, "I am going up to dress now, but if you are not feeling up to the ball, don't come; let Maude go alone with me."

But Christine replied, "Of course, if you don't want me, I will not come."

And Lady Loder answered, "I have no

wish to leave you at home; run up and get ready, then."

To their great surprise, at the ball she was the gayest of the gay; laughing, talking, dancing, smiling; taking her latest admirer, Mr. Grimstone, perfectly aback by her graciousness, and insisting on keeping the carriage waiting an hour that she might stay for the cotillon. The next day, however, the acid vein returned. She sat nearly all the morning in her bedroom, and Maude, who could not gain admission, thought she heard sounds of sobbing, through the door. Late in the afternoon Mr. Carew appeared, according to arrangement, and, unconscious of the sins imputed to him, ventured to come into the room with a smile of pleasure and expectation upon his face.

"You seem to have some very good joke. What is it?" said his lady-love, tartly.

"A joke? No, I have no joke," he answered, wondering what was amiss.

Lady Loder poured out the tea.

"Shall I give you some bread and butter, Miss Ransome?"

"No, thank you."

"Some cake, then?"

"I will have some cake, but I would rather cut it myself."

"Let me do it for you;" and he offered her a piece.

"Thank you, I will not have anything except my tea."

This was said in a very aggrieved voice. He looked at her in amazement. What could be the matter!

"I think you went to see your new house last week, did you not?" said Lady Loder. "Is everything getting on well?"

"Perfectly, thank you," replied Edward. "The workmen in that part of the world

seem less slow than in most others. I found things even more advanced than I expected."

"That is right. Are the Greshams there now?"

"Yes. Lord Gresham was at the rectory with me both days; and Lady Gresham was at home, only the children unfortunately came out with measles at Worthing, and she had to go to them."

Here, then, was an indirect confirmation of Lady Esther's letter. Christine bit her lip.

"I am going to take your advice and do the drawing-room with oak panelling," he said, turning to Miss Ransome. "I think it looks better than anything else in the country."

"Did I ever say I liked oak panelling? I don't remember it. I think it looks heavy and dark."

"I thought you said once you liked it: perhaps it was for a hall. What should you say looks well in a drawing-room?—sage green, Venetian red?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Christine. "Most things look well at first, and they all fade and get ugly after a bit."

"I like red as well as anything," said Maude, trying to gloss over Christine's rudeness. "Venetian red doesn't fade; and there are patterns copied from old Italian damasks which look delightful."

"Yes, that and an Indian carpet. I like Indian carpets best of all, Miss Ransome; don't you?"

"Indian carpets, or Brussels, or felt,—yes," said Christine, bent on being provoking.

"Do you like Lord Gresham?" asked Lady Loder.

"Yes, very much. He is extremely

pleasant to deal with. He has a hearty, good-natured manner that makes me forget I only made acquaintance with him two months ago."

"He is quite a confidant of yours, I suppose?" said Christine, sarcastically.

"I don't know about that; but he is a very good fellow."

Edward felt that there was thunder in the air. What was wrong, or whether he was in any way connected with it, he was unaware, but there was no mistaking that something had unsettled his fair one's temper. He had never seen her thus before. What could he do? Edward Carew was a man who would never suffer or cause others to suffer for want of a word of explanation.

As he was going out of the room, he said as he took leave of Christine, "Have I offended you, Miss Ransome? I am

sure, if I have, it has been quite unintentionally. Have I done anything that annoys you?"

At which Christine looked him full in the face, and said with a vinegary smile, "No, indeed; how could anything that you have done possibly have annoyed me?" And then he knew from her face and way, that it was with him that she was angry.

In what manner had he transgressed? Had he been too outspoken last Sunday when she had confided to him her misdemeanour with regard to Sophy? It could hardly be that; she had appeared to take all he had said in perfectly good part. Had some one been making mischief between them? No one would have any interest in so doing excepting Peter, and though he was in Mr. Carew's estimation a "thorough ass," he was not a

villain. As usual when in difficulty, he appealed to Effie, but she could offer no shadow of an explanation.

"There evidently was nothing amiss on Sunday, and I have not seen her since. We must find out."

And so the evening passed, and Edward, though he thought, and thought, and thought, could imagine nothing which could in any way elucidate the mystery of Miss Ransome's displeasure.

## CHAPTER V.

"It's gude to be merry and kind,
It's gude to be honest and true,
It's gude to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new."

*Old Song.*

A FEW evenings later the Loders met Sir Walter Grenville at a ball. Maude had expected to see him there, and had composed a little remark wherewith to greet him, for fear there should be an embarrassing silence.

As it happened, Sir Walter had done the same, so their observations crossed.

"I have just been to a ball to which I was not invited. It is four or five doors further down the square. I did not dis-

cover my mistake till I saw the lady of the house," said he.

"We very nearly went in by mistake to Mrs. Hamilton's, at number eighty-six," she had begun.

They both stopped and laughed, and Sir Walter asked Maude for a dance. He seemed very desirous of putting her completely at her ease; he talked pleasantly to her and, was quite his old joyous self, and all Maude's intended barriers of reserve broke down, and the two made themselves very happy together. She could not have believed that, at the very next meeting after their unfortunate conversation, she should have felt so comfortable with him. She liked him for being able so entirely to sink all recollection of what had passed between them. She resolved to take her cue from him, and let it all be as if it had not been.

Christine, whose acute attack of ill-temper had latterly subsided into a state of suppressed crossness and gloomy silence, had as usual recovered temporarily when the evening had arrived, and the ball-gown was on. She was still resolved to avenge herself for Mr. Carew's faithlessness on mankind at large, and she was using all her arts on poor Mr. Grimstone, who was entirely captivated by her charms. She had danced repeatedly with him, she had sat in the conservatory with him, she had made him fetch her ices, and now she was standing with him on the covered-in balcony, cold but triumphant. Christine was never so happy as when she had caught some one, no matter who, in her toils.

Besides, might not this infatuation of Mr. Grimstone's be turned to account? June was wearing away. In another month the day of grace would be over,

and she should be once more established at Falconbridge, listening to Beatrix's jocose conversations with Mr. Albert Palmer. It behoved her to arrange something about her future. Now, of one thing she was certain, she greatly preferred Mr. Grimstone to Peter Menteith, backed up as he was by the charms of Wollaston and twelve or fifteen thousand a year. Edward Carew had proved faithless. Alas! and alas! But that was no reason for not making the best that remained to her, of her lot.

As these thoughts passed through her mind, she infused additional sweetness into her smiles, and sprightliness into her answers. Indeed, here and there she even threw in a touch of sentiment. The strains of "Chantilly" sounded through the rooms, and reached the couple on the balcony. Mr. Grimstone was transfixed with admiration for his fair companion.

Oh, how should he best utilize the rapidly flying minutes?

"I wonder if you could be happy in a country life on a not very large scale?" he asked.

He thought that the beautiful girl at his side must have been born to wear purple and fine linen, and fare very sumptuously every day. A house in Grosvenor Square, unlimited diamonds and rubies and pearls, and twelve carriage horses at least, seemed her necessary appendages. The Cottage, the pony-carriage with old wall-eyed "Billy," and the "good plain cook," of his Shropshire house, seemed painfully unworthy of her. Pounds, shillings, and pence were weighing heavily with him that night; and so it fell out that, instead of talking of the love and adoration for her with which his heart was overflowing, he went on harping on matters of financial detail.

"I wonder if you would miss all the gaiety and luxury you are accustomed to, or if you could be satisfied with a different kind of life?"

"I am not used to gaiety and luxury," she responded gently. "I have kind friends who are good to me here; but my own home in the country is quite what you would call on a small scale, and I am always very happy there." (Oh, Christine!) "You must not think me a frivolous, exacting girl, Mr. Grimstone. I am happy anywhere with those I love."

There was a pause—a long pause. Mr. Grimstone made two efforts to speak, both of which were unsuccessful. He began a third time.

"Do you think, then, that——"

The music had suddenly stopped. Mr. Grimstone's voice, which had been pitched so as to be audible above its melody,

sounded fearfully loud as it ceased. He and his partner both started, and looked round; the balcony was invaded by several couples, and the opportunity was lost.

"How tiresome!" thought Christine. "Not that I should have known what to say if he had gone on; perhaps, therefore, it was just as well that he didn't." And she re-entered the dancing-room with a delightfully unconscious air, and joined Lady Loder, who was declaring that she would wait no longer.

Escorted by her crestfallen partner, she followed her chaperon and Maude to the cloak-room, where Sir Walter Grenville assisted in finding the ladies' shawls, and afterwards took them to the carriage.

"Did you dance *all* night with Mr. Grimstone, Christine?" said Maude, when they had reached their rooms.

It was an understood thing that Miss

Loder was to ask any questions that pleased her, whilst Christine was not to expect reciprocal confidences.

"A good many times," said Christine. "Did you know that Edward Carew was going to be married?" she went on, with apparent inconsequence.

"Indeed! is he? Did Mr. Grimstone say so?"

"No," responded Christine. "Maude, I think Mr. Grimstone is going to propose to me. If he does, shall I accept him?"

This disconnected conversation was a complete puzzle to Maude. Suddenly the truth flashed on her.

"Oh, Christine, do you care for Edward Carew? and is he going to be married? Oh, I am so sorry! But you must not accept Mr. Grimstone; you would make yourself wretched for life."

And then the whole story came out; and

Christine told how Edward had seemed to single her out, and consult her, and direct her; and how she had grown to believe he loved her; and how there was no one in all the world that she cared for but him; that she knew she was silly and ignorant, and frivolous and weak; and that she felt, if she had married him, she could have become something better and more worthy; and how all that would make life bright had gone out of her reach, for Edward had himself said, he was soon going to be married to a pretty, charming girl.

Maude listened, and commented, and sympathized, and offered consolations to her friend with true sorrow and pity for her, but with a feeling verging on contempt, that she could not stifle. Seeing that she was now sitting weeping about the loss of Edward Carew, how could she

find it within her to contemplate marrying Mr. Grimstone? It was horrible, shocking! Maude's own faith was firm: perpetual spinsterhood was the only legitimate consequence of an unfortunate attachment.

The two girls talked on till the June sun had long risen; and when they parted, Christine felt far the better for having disburdened her mind.

It is an old saying, and a true one, that "confidence redoubleth joys, and cutteth grief in halves." The effort she had made to keep her secret had been almost too much for her; it had not been so much the gnawing pain at her heart, that had discomposed her serenity, and unbalanced her temper; as the misery of bearing that pain without a word of sympathy to lighten the burden. Now that she had told her tale, a change came over her whole condition. The next day she ceased

assaulting everybody with her sharp remarks; she gave way to a tender melancholy. Maude knew all about her sorrows; Maude looked upon her as an interesting sufferer; Maude was aware how important it was to spare her all annoyance. Christine felt that her best course was to lie on the sofa, with a bottle of salts beside her, and read poetry with a wail in it, and talk about people who die young of consumption, and of the blessing it is to them. And Maude ministered to her creature comforts, and tried to teach herself that Christine's nature was very sensitive, and that people were differently made, and that it was quite right and natural that her friend should receive and expect an openly expressed condolence, which, in a like position would have been hateful, burdensome, nay, absolutely intolerable, to herself.

"What on earth is the matter with

Christine?" asked Lady Loder, laughing heartily, after coming out of the drawing-room and leaving her guest lying on the sofa, supported by eider-down cushions and fanning herself with an air of languor.

"I think she is vexed about something, but I mustn't say what," replied Maude, who could not help smiling too.

"A broken heart, I suppose?" said Lady Loder, as cheerfully as possible. "It will soon mend up, so it doesn't matter. I know Christine pretty well."

There certainly were temporary healings in the wounded member. The forenoon had passed slowly; the mournings of the poets, and the prospect of death, had alike grown wearisome by one o'clock, when a three-cornered note was handed to her from Mrs. Menteith.

"One word, dearest Christine, to ask

you to come and walk in the Park. Peter will bring you to me, and we will all go to the Row together. My love will not mind coming as far as Stanhope Street gate with him!

"Your most affectionate cousin,

"AUGUSTA."

Any change was acceptable. She felt she could be quite fairly light-hearted for an interval, if out of sight of anybody who could remind her of her troubles, or expect her to be disconsolate. She dressed quickly, and found Peter in the street.

"You certainly know how to get yourself up!" he exclaimed admiringly, looking at her dull black satin gown, sparkling all over with jet trimmings, and her neat gloves, and dandy little boots. "Do you rig yourself out, or does the old lady choose your things?"

"We generally buy them together, but I do most of the choosing."

"The more credit to your talents, then; though you would look well in anything you put on, you have such an A 1 figure. Look at that girl in gauze, now; what a guy she has made of herself!"

"A girl in gauze?"

"Yes, there. Don't you call that gauze? No?" as Christine laughed, with unaffected amusement, at his mistake. "You see, I never had a sister, and a fellow is all abroad about women's things, who has never had one. Stuffs, and lace, and silks I know nothing about; I have never had anything to do with them."

"It must be very odd to have no sisters. I, who have five, can't imagine a house without them. Whereabouts is your mother? Why didn't she come for me?"

"She wanted to spare herself the extra walk. We shall find her by Stanhope Street Gate, unless she has moved."

Christine felt quite benevolently towards Peter Menteith that day. It was a comfort, at least, that he was always well dressed; there was nothing to be ashamed of in his turn-out.

The day was sunny and bright; there were quantities of people about; several passers-by cast glances of admiration at her and her toilette; altogether she was well satisfied to have left the sofa, and the salts, and the poets behind her.

They entered the Park, and she looked across the drive in search of Mrs. Menteith. She was nowhere to be seen.

"Where can she be?" asked Christine.

"Let us go towards the Row," said Peter; and rather unwillingly she turned her steps in that direction.

"I can't go and walk with you there alone," said Christine.

"Oh, come along," responded her companion. "Look out ahead for a red bonnet."

Some young men passed with whom Miss Ransome was acquainted; they took off their hats, and seemed rather surprised to see her thus accompanied.

"There is a lady in a red bonnet some way on," said Christine.

"All right," returned Peter; "but you needn't be in such a hurry. I was asking Lady Loder, last Tuesday, to bring you to stay at Wollaston, when you leave London. Do you think there is any chance of its coming off?"

"I really don't know. I did not hear her say anything about it."

"You would like to come, wouldn't you?"

"Oh yes, very much."

"We would have no end of fun. Perhaps we could get up a dance, or theatricals, or something; and, at any rate, I should like you to see the place. Do try and fix it up."

"Very well, I will."

"I like Miss Loder; she's awfully pretty, isn't she?"

"Very pretty. I don't know what I should do without her; she and I are the greatest friends."

"The more praise to you both. Two of a trade don't generally agree."

All the time they were stepping slowly along with the stream. The red bonnet was only a little way ahead. The wearer turned. It was not Mrs. Menteith.

"I don't believe your mother is here at all," exclaimed Christine, impatiently. She spoke at random, not meaning what

she said; but Peter's face had a queer expression on it, which made her think her words were truer than she had guessed when she spoke them. "Is she here?"

"She had every intention of coming this morning: you read her note," answered Mr. Menteith, evasively.

"Then did you not start together? You said you had left her at Stanhope Street Gate." Christine spoke very angrily.

"What does it matter where she is, so long as I am here?" he cried. "Can't you make allowances for a fellow who can never get an opportunity of seeing you quietly, without making one? Don't be so cross, Miss Ransome. She had meant to come, and had written the note and all, and then a friend dropped in, and kept her. That's the real truth, if you will have it."

They had reached a side path, and Christine turned to the right and strode vigorously along it without answering; Peter perforce followed, expostulating all the way.

"I think you have acted a mean, ungentleman like part," she said, as soon as she found herself at a safe distance from the crowd. "I wonder what name you give to such fictions as you have been imposing on me? I call them by one very short, very ugly word."

"What's that?" asked Peter, dull to the last.

"Lies," said the young lady, tersely.

"Do you mean to say I'm a liar?" asked Peter.

"I won't contradict you," retorted she.

"Look here, Miss Ransome," he said, hotly. "I can't stand everything, even from you. You must retract that if you

please. I never said my mother was here."

"You said she was here, and dressed in a red bonnet."

"I didn't. I said, 'Look ahead for a red bonnet.' A joke's a joke, not a lie. Be so good as to unsay what you said just now."

"I won't."

"You are a frivolous, heartless flirt," said Peter, loudly.

"Don't shout so," said Christine, bitterly. "Keep your complaints to yourself, unless you want all the Park to hear them."

A young man and a young woman were approaching, but both Mr. Menteith and Miss Ransome were too absorbed in their controversy to notice them. She walked along with her eyes fixed on some distant point before her; he was looking down on the pathway, and poking any exceptionably large pebbles with his stick.

"My! Christine!" exclaimed a voice; and looking up, Christine found herself face to face with her sister Beatrix, who was walking along by the side of Mr. Albert Palmer, on whose arm she was supporting half her weight.

"Beatrix! What are you doing here?"

"We are on our way to the Row," said the gentleman. "Only yesterday your sister consented to make me a happy man, and, just to commemorate our engagement, we have run up by the early train to do some sights."

Bee was in the inevitable blue serge; but it was profusely decorated with brilliant yellow bows, another of which flourished aloft in her toque. Her cameo glorified her neck.

"Don't you congratulate me?" she simpered.

"Indeed, I wish you every happiness," stammered Christine.

Terrible as the couple had looked in the shades of the country, they were ten times worse in London. Mr. Palmer wore a high hat, a blue serge suit, patent leather boots with brown tops, and a crimson sailor's knot tie, with a horse-shoe pin in it. Peter stood some way off by the side of the path, alternately digging up pebbles, and glancing with withering scorn at Mr. Palmer.

"Shall we call in at No. 49 to lunch by-and-by?" asked Bee.

"Oh no!" cried Christine; "that is, I am afraid we should not be at home; we have to go out very early this afternoon."

"I think we had better go on, my love," said Mr. Palmer.

"Perhaps we had," replied Bee. "Good-bye, Christine;" and pulling down the jacket of her serge dress—a habit she had contracted from an ever-present conscious-

ness of the wrinkles at the waist—Miss Beatrix Ransome went on her way.

"Who are those awful snobs?"

Peter knew perfectly well; but the hour of his revenge had come, and he rejoiced in it.

"Those awful snobs, as you are good enough to call them, are my sister and her future husband."

"They will suit each other to a T. Made for one another, I should say! Desirable connections those! Eh, Miss Christine?"

Christine writhed inwardly, though she would not show it; he had hit her in the tenderest part.

"Quite as desirable as some other people's," she returned loftily.

"Whose do you mean."

"I do not choose to say."

"You have a perfect devil of a temper," he replied angrily.

"I beg you will not swear at me."

Once more the advantage was on her side, for Peter had completely lost his self-command.

"You have a perfect devil of a temper," he repeated; "I pity the man whom you marry."

"Mr. Menteith," said Christine, stopping short, "I wish it to be understood that from this moment our acquaintance ceases. You need come no further with me; I shall walk home alone. I shall call no more at your mother's—you can tell her so from me; and if I meet you, I shall not speak to you. I think you have behaved disgracefully, and as no gentleman would have permitted himself to do." So saying she crossed the carriage road, and wended her way homeward without another word.

Peter looked after her in abject despair. Her words had dissipated the fumes of his

wrath, and he now only knew that with that retreating figure he was losing all he held most dear on earth. He had started on his expedition with bright anticipations, he was returning with shattered hopes. In spite of her perversity and scornful ways, he had counted on winning her at last; now he could not but see that all, even the remotest, chance of success was at an end. "I'll go down and propose to Esmé Beech this very afternoon," he said to himself; "she'll have me fast enough." And he turned sadly in the direction of the Marble Arch.

Christine sped along to Stanhope Street Gate with anger and triumph in her heart. It is not every girl who can say she has slighted, quarrelled with, and driven from her a suitor with fifteen thousand a year, and one who has done so, stands in a proud position for which she is right to be

thankful. Yet, when the first moments of her self-gratulation were over, there were counter-balancing considerations that diminished the flow of her spirits. The recollection of the effect produced by her sister's appearance on her late admirer filled her with apprehension. True, Peter was no doubt glad to vent his ill-humour by saying hard things of Bee and Mr. Palmer; but calling to remembrance her sister's languishing manners and horrible toilette, as she leant on the arm of that repulsive young man, she could not but confess that they were not unmerited. If even Peter criticized her relations so harshly, would not they alienate from her any other lover who might see them? What would Mr. Grimstone think of them? what effect would they have had on Edward Carew? At the thought of the last-mentioned name, all her melancholy returned upon her.

"What, back already!" exclaimed Maude, as her dejected countenance appeared in the doorway.

"The whole thing was a pretence," said Christine, gloomily; "Mrs. Menteith was not in the Park at all, and Peter apparently thought I was going to walk in Rotten Row with him alone. I hate him, Maude. I have quarrelled with him for good and all, and am never going to see any of them again. I have told him so."

"A very good thing, too," replied Maude. "He is quite past bearing; I never could imagine how you could endure him."

"But I am losing all my friends," said Christine, whimpering, as she cast a thought after the flesh-pots in Egypt.

"Never mind; there are better fish in the sea than Mr. Menteith, at any rate," said Maude, consolingly, using an argument which she would have been angry

enough, had any one ventured to urge upon herself.

"And then I met my sister Beatrix, who has engaged herself, it seems, to that nasty low shop-keeping man, Albert Palmer, whom I told you about. They have come up for a day's sight-seeing, and they looked —oh, so dreadful! They offered to come here to luncheon, only I refused."

"Did they?" said Maude, perfectly awe-struck.

"Am not I unfortunate in having such relations?" sobbed Christine, her very small amount of fortitude succumbing. "They will stand in my way in anything—anything—that is arranged for myself. There is no one who could put up with them."

"No indeed, dear; any one who cared for you would put up with them for your sake. What sort of love would it be that would let such a thing interfere?"

Perhaps Christine's sentiments were the truer, but there was an innocent grace in the way in which Maude held her faith on the subject of love. Christine's distress lessened, especially as she remembered that there is nothing so dangerous to the eyelashes as crying.

It was some consolation, later in the day, to receive from her father an envelope full of banknotes. She counted them, and found the amount was a hundred pounds. She put them into a sheet of paper, on which she wrote, "Mr. Ransome, of Falconbridge, returns to Mr. Menteith the loan made to him last month," and forwarded them without delay to Peter. "I hope and trust that that is the last communication I shall hold with him. What a mercy papa has been able to save that money! I should not have liked to leave it unpaid," she said to herself. She had hardly closed

her cover when Lady Loder bustled into the drawing-room.

"I have done such a stupid thing," she said. "I have torn up a note from Walter Grenville, mistaking it for a bill; and I hadn't even read it, and don't know if it required an answer."

"Most probably we shall meet him at the ball to-night," said Maude, "and then you can ask him what was in it."

"I dare say it was nothing of any importance, but still I hate doing such stupid things."

The evening came, but Sir Walter Grenville was not at the ball, although the giver was a relation of his; and when appealed to, she knew nothing of the cause of his absence.

"What shall I do about that tiresome note, Maude?" asked Lady Loder.

"We shall be sure to see him some-

where in the course of the next few days; very likely he may call," said Maude. Nevertheless, she wondered a good deal what could have kept him away from the dance, and what the contents of the note had been. She also thought the ball a very dull one; but, then, they had rubbed bees-wax on the floor, which was enough to account for that.

Next morning Christine received the following letter from Mr. Grimstone :—

"My dear Miss Ransome,

"I do not know how long it may be before we meet again, so I must tell you in writing, what I was going to say to you the other night at Mrs. Musgrave's. Never before had I wished as I wished then for wealth and all the other good things of this world, because their possession would have made me (though in how

small a degree I know only too well) more worthy of you.

"Is it altogether a vain dream, a wild hope, that you might overlook these, and all other deficiencies in me, and consent to become my wife? I know how infinitely small my chance must be, but I cannot refrain from asking you the question. Whatever others may offer you in the way of worldly advantages, none, I feel convinced, could love you more—I should like to say as much, as I do. If you have the slightest inclination towards me, I entreat you to give my request a favourable consideration.

"I remain

"Yours very truly,

"HENRY GRIMSTONE."

One short hour ago Miss Ransome had been lying in bed, crying as she thought

of her injuries, her sorrows, and her anxieties. It is hard on a girl to see a long vista of happiness stretched out before her, and then to watch it dim, and fade, and vanish, before she has reached it. No one will think the worse of Christine for her tears. But this letter acted like magic upon her mind. The feeling of triumph which had buoyed her up, after her dismissal of Peter, again came to her support. In the last week or so she had lost two lovers, and here was a third ready to step into their place. Mr. Grimstone was gentlemanlike, good-looking, and well-connected, and evidently much attached to her; there could be little doubt that he would be ready, if called upon, to adopt Mrs. Ransome and Beatrix, and Lotty and Florence, and Sophy and Hester—yes, and even Mr. Albert Palmer—as his connections. In

the delicious excitement of finding herself sought by a fresh admirer, she did not trouble her brain by remembering that she would have in the course of the morning to send an answer to his note; she gave herself up to pleasant day-dreams, of which she of course was the heroine. Suppose she was to accept Mr. Grimstone? She pictured to herself with benevolent joy, his happiness when he should receive her note. Of course he would come and see her at once. She might have quite an exciting day if she chose. If, on the other hand, she refused him, she could imagine his despair. In her mind's eye she could see him sitting pale, haggard, and hollow-eyed before his table, leaning his head on his hand, whilst his landlady put a few things together in a carpet-bag, preparatory to his sudden departure for New Zealand, Central Africa, or any other region

which might seem to offer him oblivion, or even respite from his pain. How sweet to be young and pretty! She thought with compassion of all the old ladies of her acquaintance. What was there in life that could make it endurable at sixty?

She tried to bring her countenance to a decorous solemnity as she entered the breakfast-room. She was afraid of Maude's disapproval—unspoken, perhaps, but patent to all who could read. Seeing what was the state of the case between her and Mr. Carew, she knew her friend's code of morals would allow her no feeling but one of unmitigated regret, at Mr. Grimstone's proposal; and regret was the last sensation in her mind. "Dear Maude is so romantic," she said to herself. "How I wish—oh, how very much I wish—that I had never talked to her as I did the other day! It was most unfortunate."

She handed her letter to Lady Loder. "I received this just now," she said.

Lady Loder read it. It was, then, something connected with this business that had been the cause of Christine's recent unaccountable behaviour. This explained it all. Lady Loder had been quite aware that Mr. Grimstone was much attracted by her pretty *protégée*; but, then, so were half the men she knew. She had never thought he could afford to marry a girl without fortune.

"My dear!" she exclaimed; "I am so glad! I wish you joy with all my heart. I wish there was a little more money; but one can't have everything, and Henry Grimstone is a very nice fellow, and belongs to very nice people." So saying, she kissed her heartily.

Maude looked at her with horror in her eyes. Could it be that Christine, with

her tears for Edward Carew hardly dry, and her lamentations about his faithlessness scarcely off her lips—could it be that she was prepared to turn to Mr. Grimstone, and assure him of her undivided affection, and complete happiness in his love? All her stern rectitude rose up in judgment against the bride-elect. But to her relief the bride-elect shook herself free from Lady Loder's embrace.

"But I'm not going to marry him," she said, her face dimpled with smiles. To tell the truth, till this moment she had been just a little bit undecided in her own mind, but now all of a sudden she knew that she couldn't do it.

"Not marry him!" ejaculated Lady Loder, her face falling visibly. "Why not? It would be such a capital arrangement. You should be married from this house, and I would give you your trousseau."

"You are always very much too good to me," said Christine, gratefully. The offer of several hundred pounds' worth of silks and satins, appealed directly to the most sensitive part of her nature.

"I like Mr. Grimstone very much, but not enough to make me wish to marry him."

"What nonsense!" replied Lady Loder. "However, of course you will do as you like. I never interfere in such matters."

"Don't think of it, Christine," said Maude, decidedly. "You would repent it bitterly if you did."

Lady Loder made a few more efforts to reason with her charge, or at any rate to extract some more "sensible reason" for her refusal, than the reiterated assurance that she didn't care for him enough, and that it would be very hard on him to engage herself to him without more feeling for him than she could muster.

"Well, if you are quite determined, you had better stay downstairs, where you will have the room to yourself, and write an answer," she said; and so Christine found herself left alone in the dining-room with her pen and ink.

But Christine was not an eloquent writer. An hour passed, and she had only succeeded in spoiling half a dozen sheets of paper. One letter was cruelly cold; the next was so put as hardly to make her sentiments intelligible; a third had a blot, and two mistakes in spelling. At last a more judiciously worded version was composed, and was just being put into an envelope, when the door was opened and "Mr. Carew" was announced.

"Am I too early a visitor?" he asked.

"Not at all," she replied, blushing guiltily. "Lady Loder is upstairs."

"I did not come to see her," he re-

plied. "It was you whom I wanted to find."

Her heart beat, but she resolutely held her tongue. If he was come to tell her of his engagement, she was not going to help him. He noticed her fixed expression.

"Perhaps you are busy?" he said. "I see you are writing circulars or something," and he glanced at the sheets strewn about the table.

"I was writing a letter: it can quite well wait." She had determined to be very distant and dignified, but to see him get up and go away, when a word could stop him, was beyond her power.

"Miss Ransome, when you told me the other day that I had not offended you, your face contradicted what you said. I don't ask you now *if* I have offended you, but *how* I have offended you? We have

been friends, and you will at least answer me that, will you not?"

It is quite impossible for a girl to say, "You made me think you cared for me, and now I hear you are going to marry some one else, and I resent that;" so Christine kept silence, and ransacked her brain for an appropriate excuse.

"I hardly understood your behaviour to me when last I called. I had never seen you so before."

He paused. Still no answer came.

"Is it your wish that our friendship should cease?"

"I think it will be best," she faltered.

"And you will give no reason?"

"Why should I? Let us part friends; that is all."

"It is not fair to overturn a man's entire happiness, and ruin his life without so much as giving a reason."

"I cannot think how you can bring yourself to speak to me like that." Christine's tones were hurt and indignant.

"I am merely speaking the plain truth; and surely what I say can be no surprise to you, Miss Ransome."

"No surprise? I assure you it is a very great surprise! You know very well that it is not to me that you should say such things."

Edward felt perfectly bewildered; then an idea struck him, and he turned very white.

"Are you engaged to some one else? On my honour, I didn't know it."

This seemed to him the only possible interpretation to put on her words.

A spirit of malice seized her. "Yes," she replied. "Look here!" And she put Mr. Grimstone's letter into his hands.

He just glanced at it, and then said,

pausing painfully between the words, "I ought to wish you joy—but I cannot. I had better go."

He rose, but made no sign of further departure. She gazed blankly at the wall.

"I suppose I was a conceited fool!" he burst out, speaking low and fast; "but I must confess I had hoped you cared for me. I dare say the mistake was entirely my own fault. You are gentle and good, and can't help being kind to every one; none the less, it is very hard to bear. But I will go. I was a fool for misunderstanding you, but I am worse than a fool for talking like this, when I know you are engaged to another man."

"You seem to think nothing of the fact that you are engaged to another woman!" cried Christine, forgetting all discretion in her anguish of mind.

"I engaged to another woman! What do you mean?"

Christine had been leaning against the high chimney-piece, with her face buried in her pocket-handkerchief, crying as if no such things as eyelashes existed. Now she stood upright, and confronted him; with her blue eyes flashing out of her tear-stained face, though she trembled all over. "It was you yourself who said you were engaged."

"I never said such a thing in all my life. What are you thinking of?"

"Do you mean to deny that you said so to Lord Gresham? He told his wife, and she told Lady Esther Hanway, who wrote it to me."

"On my word, you are quite mistaken. Ah! I know now how the story got about. Lord Gresham said I should want a nice wife in my rectory, and I answered that

maybe the nice wife would come in time; and I thought of you, and no one else, as I spoke. That has been at the bottom of it all. But now there will never be any wife there, for you are the only woman I have ever loved—and you are going to marry Grimstone."

Her senses seemed in a whirl; her heart was thumping so that she could hardly breathe.

"But I am not," she managed to whisper. "I only said it to aggravate you. See, if you won't believe what I tell you; this is the letter which is going to him."

Edward Carew's face turned even whiter than before. "I am afraid of making a mistake again," he said, hesitating. "Tell me, am I doing so, or is it really me whom you love?"

He held out his arms, and she buried her face on his shoulder.

A long while elapsed. The clock on the mantelpiece had chimed the quarter five times, when Lady Loder's voice was heard calling over the stairs—

"Christine! is your letter ready? Mackay is sending to the post."

Miss Ransome jumped up. "Oh, Mr. Carew! what will she say?"

"I won't answer to that name," replied her companion.

"You really don't help one much in one's difficulties," she responded, laughing, but still evading the Christian name.

"Christine!" Again Lady Loder's voice sounded.

Miss Ransome ran to the door, sprang up the steps two at a time, and threw her arms recklessly round Lady Loder's neck.

"I'm engaged to be married, though it is not to Mr. Grimstone. Guess who it is to!"

"Not to Peter Menteith, I trust. But what do you mean?"

"Guess, Maude!"

"To Edward Carew!" cried Maude, divining aright, as she looked at the radiant face of the young girl.

Christine nodded.

"But was the letter from him? Was it not from Mr. Grimstone?" said Maude, making a wild guess.

"No. But he has been sitting here talking for half an hour. And he was not engaged to the other girl, Maude; it was me whom he wanted to marry all the time. The story I told you was nothing but a mistake, and an invention. Oh dear! I am so happy."

"I am very, very glad," said Maude. "I don't know that I ever was more pleased in my life."

"I'm sure I never was more surprised,"

added Lady Loder. "I don't half understand the state of the case now. However, it is all right, which I suppose is the only thing that matters."

And then followed a great many kisses, and questions, and explanations, and congratulations; in the midst of which Edward joined the upstairs party, and then they all talked at once.

Christine's day had been more exciting than she could possibly have anticipated; and oh! what pleasant, happy excitement had fallen to her lot! Was ever a girl so much to be envied as she? Half an hour ago she had looked forward to a dull and dreary future, and now all that imagination could paint was to be hers. Close before her was the summit of earthly bliss—of bliss that seemed all the more complete and precious, from its threatened loss. How pleased her mother would be!

She would be married as soon as Beatrix, after all. And what a triumph over Peter! She almost thought she must be forgiving enough to let bygones be bygones, and write and inform Mrs. Menteith of her good fortune.

Such happiness as Christine's inclines people to be merciful, and so she wrote a very nicely worded note to her cousin Augusta, in which she made no allusion to any past injuries.

It was crossed by the following missive from Mrs. Menteith :—

"My DARLING CHRISTINE,

"Judge of my surprise when, last night, my dearest Peter informed me of an engagement which he had entered into with Miss Esmé Beech. I must say I thought he had *other views*; but even a *mother* may be deceived, you see. I trust

that the heart of a certain little friend of mine is not concerned. Let me know, my love, that this is not so, and that what has occurred will not make any breach in our warm friendship for each other. If I had not had *other hopes* for my boy, I should be pleased at the marriage, for Miss Beech is a nice girl and well off. Peter is dotingly in love!

"Write soon, and let me know how you are.

"Yours devotedly,

"AUGUSTA."

Christine's lip curled. "I am glad I wrote to her first," she said; "otherwise I really believe she would have thought that Peter had thrown me over, and that I was marrying Edward to console myself. It would have been just like her to think of such a thing."

One would have supposed, on seeing Christine's righteous indignation, that similar conduct could never have even been contemplated by herself.

Mrs. Ransome's congratulatory letter was characteristic. It was as follows:—

"Alexandra Villa, Falconbridge.

"MY DEAREST CHILD,

"Your letter has made me very very happy. I thought that I should get off one daughter this year, but I never dreamt of marrying two. And such luck about both trousseaux, too! Bee is getting all hers at a reduction from Palmer and Gowran's—though, by-the-by, Albert is taking his name off, and it is to be Gowran and Barne's for the future. Do you think Lady Loder would buy you yours at once, so that we should copy a few of the things for Bee? Of course,

London fashions are the newest, though they have a Parisian as forewoman at Palmer's—at least, she speaks with a foreign accent.

"Give my love to Mr. Carew, and say I will be a mother to him, and the girls sisters. I hope soon to make his acquaintance. I suppose he is the sandy-haired young man Bee saw you walking with in the Park. I have no objection to sandy hair myself, as some have. Bee has done best for herself as regards money; but you will have two thousand a year to live on, from what I can gather from Mr. Carew's letter to father, and that is quite enough to be comfortable. I suppose we shall have Lotty and Florence flying away next. Albert has given each of the girls a velvet hat with a gilt buckle in it.

"I do not know that I like your being married in London. I had intended that

your wedding and Bee's should be the same day here, so that one breakfast would have done for both. Lady Loder could have come down, and had the best room; and we would have had Hicks in to wait. Still, as she wishes it, I won't be the one to contradict.

"Your most affectionate mother,

"ARABELLA RANSOME."

Christine showed this letter to her betrothed, but he was already too well acquainted with her family, to experience any shock. She also exhibited the photograph, representing Mrs. Ransome in the enjoyment of her literary leisure; and though she watched him closely, he did not shrink.

"She is a kind-looking old lady," he said. "I like people to fatten as they age, and not to shrivel."

So now that he was aware of both the physical and mental peculiarities of her family, there was nothing more to fear.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Love is thine, O heart, and surely
Peace shall also be thine own;
For the heart that trusteth purely
Never long can pine alone."

LOWELL.

EVERYBODY knows how much easier it is to sympathize with sorrow than with joy. Those who love to be hard on poor human nature, attribute this to envy; the more lenient, account for it by saying that sympathy exacted by a person at the summit of a great joy (and in these circumstances people are very exacting) is accepted by them as a matter of course, and rewarded by no gratitude; whereas sympathy bestowed upon a fellow-creature

in grief or suffering, draws the giver and the receiver together in a close bond of union, and gives rise to a kindly feeling between them that nothing can efface.

However this may be, Maude found it very difficult to keep up the requisite amount of interest in Christine's doings. The daily letters, the succession of presents, the ceaseless calls of dressmakers, jewellers, and *lingères*, the endless discussions as to the relative merits of *point de Lisle*, and *point d'Alençon*—all this, after a time, became weary work to Maude. Morning and evening the same thing went on, for there was a great deal to settle and arrange. The middle of June was past; Lady Loder did not wish to be kept in London later than the third week in July; so, if the wedding was to take place before then, there was clearly no time to be lost.

Lady Loder was so busy that she quite

forgot to do anything about the note from Sir Walter Grenville which she had torn up, or to wonder why they never met him when they went out at night. But Maude did not forget, and she wondered a good deal about his proceedings. Her complete isolation at this time (for the rest of the household were oblivious of everything but millinery and dresses) gave her ample leisure for her cogitations. What could have happened to him? The most unlikely fancies came into her mind. Perhaps, as Effie had suggested, he had taken her brusqueness at Glaston as equivalent to a definite refusal, and had resolved to call less often in Hertford Street; perhaps, for the same reason, he avoided the balls and parties to which she would most probably be going; perhaps he was tired of London, and had returned to Shustone. She could not

disguise from herself that she missed him a good deal. Again and again she found herself puzzling her brain with thinking what there could possibly have been in that note, and lamenting that Lady Loder should have torn it up. It might have required an answer, and Sir Walter might have been put out at receiving none. "Might" is a little word, but it leads up to a vast realm of surmise and speculation, and in that realm Maude's imagination strayed about a good deal, in the course of each twenty-four hours.

Her hypotheses were one morning overturned by a paragraph which caught her eye in the columns of the *Post*. It was headed, "Another Outrage in Ireland," and she read as follows:—"Yesterday afternoon, as Sir Walter Grenville, who has recently succeeded to the Kirkmannon estates, was driving along the road between Grady and

Drumhall; a man, who had been lying concealed in a ditch, suddenly sprung up and discharged a gun at him. The shot took effect, and the young baronet sank down in the car. The agent, who was seated beside Sir Walter on the box, fired his revolver at the would-be assassin, and then tried to check the horse, which had taken fright at the noise of the fire-arms. When at length he succeeded in stopping it, Sir Walter's right arm proved to be broken, and he had fainted from loss of blood. The agent, Mr. Brown, declares that the aggressor was a man named O'Donahue, who had lately been concerned in an attempt to set alight the roof of an outbuilding at Kirkmannon House. The place is in the centre of the disturbed district. Only last spring the agent for the property was murdered, and it was on business connected with the detection of the

criminals, that Sir Walter Grenville had been summoned to Ireland, a few days before the last murderous assault. We are glad to learn, on inquiry, that the wounded man is progressing favourably. O'Donahue has been arrested."

Maude's face flushed crimson as she glanced down the column to see what had been the end of the business. How stupid it is of those newspaper-writers to tell half of a story in one place, and put the other half somewhere else! There was a singing in her ears, and all the print looked blurred and chaotic, so that she was some time in finding. It was an unspeakable relief to know that he was doing well. She re-read the whole account, and waited till her cheeks were cool, and her voice could be trusted to speak steadily, before she handed the paper to her cousin, and said, with assumed nonchalance, "I see poor

Sir Walter Grenville has been getting into trouble in Ireland; he has had his arm broken by a ball."

"Is he in Ireland? Then that note was to tell me he was leaving London. And he has been shot at! Upon my word, Maude, you take it very quietly! Show me the paragraph."

Maude pointed out the place.

"How shocking! I am very sorry! Poor young fellow! He must be all alone there, for I don't believe he has a relation in the world; and with those rascally Irish doctors, too! Ten to one they will kill him."

"Oh, I don't suppose they will do that," said Maude.

"You are a perfect enigma to me, Maude," exclaimed her cousin. "I feel quite wretched at the thought of that poor boy, who may be dying this very moment, in an Irish pot-house; and you, who were

such friends with him, don't care a farthing."

This was a cruel accusation.

"Indeed, I am very sorry for him," replied Maude, constrainedly.

How charmingly Christine would have behaved in a similar position! How she would have lamented, and wondered, and perhaps even have wept; and then she would have slipped away upstairs, and tried on her new bonnet, remembering that no one should allow their emotions to harrow them until they become unfit for active life. To do so would be quite wrong! Maude keenly felt her inability to say the right thing.

All day long, in the interval of trousseau-hunting, her hostess kept exclaiming—"Dear me! I wish I knew how Sir Walter is getting on;" or, "Who do you suppose the property would go to if anything were

to happen to that poor boy?" or, "I hope there will be something about that poor fellow in the evening papers." And, all day long, she felt how very unsatisfactory were her responses. She was paying the penalty of her acted indifference, on announcing the news to her cousin. Having once assumed that line, an embarrassed shyness prevented her from speaking naturally about the accident.

But when dressing-time came and she went to her room, she felt miserably unhappy on her friend's account. She pictured to herself an Irish hovel in which a pale face, crowned with fair curls, was lying amid clouds of peat smoke, on a ragged bed, surrounded by whisky-drinking peasants, and a collection of beasts and feathered fowl fit only for Noah's Ark. She nearly cried, as she thought of his sufferings and solitude. Could it be true,

as Lady Loder said, that Irish doctors were inhuman wretches who would probably kill him? She writhed under her impotence to be of any use. How she wished she were a Sister of Charity, and near at hand to nurse him! As it was, there was not a thing of any kind she could do that could be of the slightest use. All the evening she felt very depressed and low, and she woke up next morning with a weight on her mind.

Later in the day, arrived a letter directed to Lady Loder, in a hand evidently unused to caligraphy, and opening it she found a note written from right to left by Sir Walter. On holding it before the looking-glass, they read :—

"Dear Lady Loder,

"The papers will have told you that I have had my arm smashed. I know

you will be glad to hear that it is doing quite well, and does not hurt me much. The inn here is excellent, and the landlady a first-rate nurse, so I am better off than if they had taken me home. My chief sorrow is that I shall be detained some time, and shall not see you" (here followed three words that had been carefully scratched over) "yet awhile. I must stop now, as the doctor does not allow me to write; but I wanted to send you a few lines from myself."

Then came a whole phrase which had been marked out, and which no ingenuity could decipher, and then the signature.

"It is a mercy he has fallen into good hands," ejaculated Lady Loder. "How thoughtful of him to write! Though it is you who should be grateful, Maude; the letter was really meant for you, not me."

"Do you think so?" said Maude. "Then I will take possession of it, and keep it as an authentic specimen of looking-glass writing."

The next time she was by herself in her room, she took a damp sponge; and, not without sundry pricks of conscience, removed part of the blots. Under the first she managed to make out, "and Miss Loder;" and under the second she read, "Will you tell Miss Loder? I wish I knew whether she is a little sorry for me."

"A little sorry for him!" She would be more than "a little sorry" for any carter-boy at Selby who had been so injured. "He shall know how sorry I am for him," she said to herself; and that evening she wrote him a long chatty letter, carefully explaining that, as he was an invalid, he would want all the amusement he could have in his solitude, and that she should

therefore write to him from time to time till he got better, and tell him what was going on in the world. Maude was half afraid that she was hereby sinning against the proprieties; but she often fretted against the conventional rules of society, and though she usually resigned herself, and submitted, she resolved on this occasion to set them at nought. Was not this the one way in which she could be of some slight use to her friend? Why, then, should she hold back for fear of what the world might say?

Perhaps the reader will think that this was very wrong and unseemly behaviour on her part; but surely the rule which forbids all exchange of letters between young men, and women under thirty, may allow of occasional relaxations; especially as, like most decrees of the kind, it falls upon the very people who ought to be exempt from

it. The nice trustworthy girls, for whose sake it was *not* instituted, are the only ones who obey it; the others, on whose account it was instituted, never for a moment suffer themselves to be bound by it.

"I suppose you are going to answer Sir Walter's note, Cousin Mary?" said Maude to Lady Loder.

"Undoubtedly," replied she. "Shall I give him your condolences?"

Maude would have given anything to prevent the warm blood rushing to her cheeks. She felt they were glowing and hot, as she took her letter from her pocket, and said—

"I have written to him myself; will you enclose my letter?"

Lady Loder raised her eyebrows, and looked sharply at her.

"Isn't it rather unusual?" she asked, drily.

"I hate those silly customs," responded Maude, stoutly.

"He will think you are very much interested in him if you write."

"Oh no; I have explained that. I only do it because I know how dull he must be."

"Of course I will send it if you wish it," said Lady Loder, doubtfully.

"Yes, please; I want it to go."

"Very well."

"I can't make her out at all," thought her cousin. "I suppose she means to marry him. Well, I dare say it will all do very well. Still, I don't like sending her letter; she ought not to have written without consulting me. I wish girls were not so wilful and independent! I wonder if she means to marry him?"

That was a question which the old lady turned over in her mind more than once

that day, and it was one to which Maude herself could not have given a satisfactory answer. If it arose, she resolutely put it away; it was a consideration which she would not allow to crop up, and complicate the state of affairs. Her present course was, at any rate, clear; it could not but be her duty to alleviate, in the slight degree which stood within her power, the loneliness and sufferings of a neighbour and friend.

She would have been flattered and pleased if she could have seen the brightening of the young man's countenance, as he perceived the signature of the second sheet of paper, in a different handwriting, which fell out of Lady Loder's envelope. He read it through and through; he kept it apart from the rest of his correspondence with tender, reverent care. It is by no means certain that he did not press his lips upon it once or twice when no one was in

the room. The arrival of the post became the daily excitement and interest to him; for though Maude wrote only twice a week, there was always a distant possibility that it might bring a letter from her, and every word that she wrote seemed precious to him.

These things, however, were hidden from her eyes. He was extremely measured in the expressions of gratitude and pleasure which he allowed himself to insert in his answers to her. She never suspected anything beyond. Her correspondence became a great interest to her; and she amused herself in choosing books for Sir Walter at one of the circulating libraries, for, now that he was shut up in his room, he was glad of any occupation to pass the day.

"You must not lose your time reading nothing but novels," she wrote; and, in addition to some works of fiction, she

despatched to him a miscellaneous collection of travels, poetry, and light science; and, though no great reader, Sir Walter found that, sweetened as the books were by the hand that sent them, he was able to get through a good deal of most of them. She pointed out to him her favourite passages in each volume, and he thought her remarks were the most brilliant specimens of criticism he had ever read. A new bond of sympathy seemed to be arising between them.

One afternoon Effie Carew called, and found Maude sitting by herself in the drawing-room. Lady Loder and Christine were spending the day in the usual round of shopping, and Maude had preferred remaining at home with her book.

"I thought very likely I should find you," said Effie. "I know your energies are flagging, and that you are glad to let

my indefatigable aunt and the bride manage their shopping between them."

"I must own I am very tired of it."

"It is perfectly dreadful! I have gone through it all myself so lately that my memory is painfully fresh on the subject; and it must be additionally horrible when the purchases are not even for one's self. I pity you sincerely, my dear."

"Thank you for your sympathy; I like to have my trials appreciated."

"Christine enjoys her occupations enormously; it is quite a pleasure to see any one so happy."

"Isn't it? And I think she is prettier than ever."

"It is quite ridiculous to hear Edward talk of her; he entertains me with descriptions of her perfections from morning till night."

"She is certainly very attractive," said Maude.

"Are not you having rather a bad time of it?" asked Mrs. Carew. "You seem to me to be nearly always alone?"

"I shall invade you rather oftener, I think," answered Maude. "I am growing a little tired of my own company. However, I don't mind solitude as much as most people."

"No; you see you are so intensely reserved, that no one but a very intimate friend is any companion to you."

"I suppose I am reserved," said Maude, meditatively.

"I should think you are," replied Effie. "It is a pity for your own sake; I am sure you lose a great deal of pleasure by it."

"I dare say I do. You see, I don't care to talk about things that don't interest me; and things that do interest me, I only care to talk about to very understanding people, —like yourself, for instance;" and Maude

laughed. She was dressed in the same dull green toilette that she had worn at the Ripstone archery meeting; her auburn curls clustered about her forehead, and fell over the upper part of her shapely little ear; her large brown eyes looked with affection upon her friend. Mrs. Carew thought she was the embodiment of all that was lovely and perfect in human form. "I'm afraid that having so little general conversation must make one very tiresome to ordinary acquaintances, but I can't help it," Maude went on.

"You do very nicely as you are," Effie replied. "Reserved people always get credit for stores of hidden wisdom, so you need not be the least afraid of being under-estimated. It is we talkers who are misjudged. People are always good enough to assume that there is nothing in us but what they see; whereas there

*may* be ungauged depths behind our chatter, and ungauged vacuity behind your silence."

"You have such a confidential air with your merest acquaintances, that you take them in. They think you are pouring out your whole soul."

"Whilst you hesitate so long whether you shall let out why you like Ellen Terry better than Modjeska, or why you don't care for German novels, that the occasion passes, and people think you are reserving your opinion for your great work on the English drama, or continental fiction."

"And don't you find that half the time you are playing at cross questions and crooked answers, and that your friends are taking all you are saying by the wrong end?"

"Certainly; but I don't mind that. I am getting at their views all the time; it

is no matter that they don't take the trouble to appreciate mine."

"But I hate being misunderstood; and I always find it difficult to explain clearly what I do mean. Sometimes I fancy reserve comes more than people think from a want of power of easy expression. Those who require time to arrange their ideas and phrases, on any but commonplace subjects, are apt to keep to commonplace subjects. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps," replied Effie. "If they are unable to do justice to their theories, for want of readiness and fluency, I dare say they often remain silent, rather than express them in an incomplete, confused manner."

"Yes, I am sure it is partly that; and then the habit of saying little, reacts upon the powers of speech, and dries them up."

"I dare say. Still, though unreserved

people are decidedly the most useful in general society, I don't think they are the best companions in home life. Now, Maurice isn't a great talker, as you know. If we dine at a pleasant house, I am sometimes vexed at the smallness of the part he takes. But, then, when we are home again, and he has had time to think out his thoughts, and is not disturbed by the noise and hurry around, you can't imagine how interesting he is. I often threaten to appropriate his ideas, and bring them out as original remarks at the next opportunity. No one knows but me, Maude, what there is in Maurice. It was that sort of reserve of force that attracted me towards him last winter. I hadn't noticed him much the first day or two, except to think how quiet he was, and then all of a sudden he began to discuss with me, the things that had been talked of the night

before at dinner; and he knew so much more about all the subjects than any one else, that I was captivated at once, and ever after gave him credit for exhaustive knowledge on every question on which he said nothing."

"I don't wonder. It must be delightful to live with somebody who keeps all his best remarks for a *tête-à-tête*."

At that moment the shoppers returned, in high good humour. They had got through no end of business. They had ordered the wedding-dress, had chosen the wreath, and had accomplished various other interesting and important commissions. Edward had met them on the door-step, and he and Christine were now having an amicable squabble as to whether she should or should not wear caps when she was married. He maintained that he would not have her pretty hair covered

up; and she, with the usual desire of very young brides to assume a matronly aspect, insisted that there was nothing so becoming, and that she never meant to go about bareheaded again.

"Do you remember, Christine," said Effie, "the first morning that you came to my house, and Edward was so entranced with the great vase which you had filled? I believe from that moment your future was settled."

Christine laughed, and declared that she should get a vase exactly like Mrs. Carew's, and keep it always filled in precisely the manner in which she had arranged hers. Her face was perfectly radiant with joy. The dimples came and went like flashes. She was not one of the brides who grow anxious under the sense of the coming change in their life, and the consciousness of new responsibilities and new duties.

There are few girls who look their best during the weeks or months of their engagement; the solemnity of the step they are about to take generally sobers them, and, amidst all their happiness, gives an expression of care to their countenances. But it was far otherwise with Christine. She gave herself up to perfect, entire bliss, undimmed by a cloud of misgiving, untroubled by a thought of the future. Sometimes, indeed, she would say to her lover, "I do hope I shall make you a good wife," but it was done far more to give him an opening for protestations, and compliments, than because she had any inward doubts on the subject.

Maude, of course, was to be one of the bridesmaids; and Minnie Carew, Edward's young sister, and two cousins of his. Florence and Lotty were also to officiate; but Lady Loder steadily refused to have

Hester and Sophy in the bridal train. "I will not have that child with the ear," she said; "she and Hester can be bridesmaids to your sister Beatrix." And so, as Christine showed no anxiety that they should come, and Mrs. Ransome rather grudged the journey-money, it was settled, to every one's satisfaction but their own, that the two younger girls should remain in the country. Beatrix was to be married the week before, so she and Mr. Palmer would be happily out of the way.

There was no small sensation at Falconbridge when the engagements of the two elder Miss Ransomes were announced, and no small disappointment when it turned out that Christine's wedding was to take place in London. "However, of course she will come down for Bee's marriage, so we shall see her then," said Lucy Skipton to her mother.

Miss Ransome, however, did not bestir herself about procuring a suit of pink lama trimmed with swan's-down, similar to those in which her four sisters were to be equipped on the great day. In hot weather people are apt to catch colds, or suffer from neuralgia, or hay-fever; and walking on the scorching pavement often produces a blister on the heel that ought not to be rubbed. A hundred things might prevent her making the journey to Falconbridge, and then what a bore it would be to have so monstrous a concoction on her hands! Of course, the people at home would be vexed if she did not come; but if Lady Loder wrote to say she could not allow her to risk the journey, and a doctor backed up her opinion in orthodox fashion, the excuse would sound quite genuine. Beatrix in the glories of white cotton-backed satin, and Albert

Palmer varnished up as a bridegroom, were sights which she should prefer imagining to witnessing, and she should hear all about the ceremony when her mother came up the following week.

"Of course you mean to go down to your sister's wedding, Christine?" Edward had said.

"Bee wants me to be one of her bridesmaids," she replied, evasively. She dared not suggest the chance of the cold or the blister on her heel to him. He had once taken her aback, by asking whether she did not think her mother would like to have her quietly to herself, for a few days' visit, at some period before her wedding; and had looked just a trifle surprised when she replied that it would be impossible to spare the time. Clearly, he did not understand the coolness which opposite notions upon cameo brooches, tea-cosies, and Aus-

tralian mutton introduce into family relationships; so it behoved her to be cautious, and cautious she was.

"It is very good of your people to take to me so kindly," he said, "seeing what a treasure I am robbing them of."

Christine thought of the difference between this point of view, and that commonly held at Alexandra Villa, where the great object in life was to find some one on whom to bestow the family treasures. Nevertheless, she loved him for believing it.

"I'm afraid you will find me anything but a treasure," she said. "Perhaps my people know me too well to grudge me to you."

She smiled as she spoke, and the dimples showed themselves in the middle of her cheeks. How young, and innocent, and fresh, and lovely she looked!

"I won't hear you try and detract from

their heroism," he said admiringly; and then followed a great deal more conversation such as they had held together since their engagement, and which the reader can doubtless supply from the stores of his or her imagination.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"And from the door went forth two happy hearts, beating side by side, with the pulse of youth and hope and joy, and within them and around them was a new Heaven and a new Earth."—LONGFELLOW.

ALL this time Sir Walter Grenville was spending at the inn at Kirkmannon. At times he had suffered a great deal from his arm; but he was young and strong, and by degrees he made progress towards a cure. Had he chosen, he might have moved from the hotel to his own house; but he was happier where he was, and stayed on from week to week, though he often talked of going home.

He still had his arm in splints, and

carried it in a sling, but he was able to get out a little, and that helped to break the tedium of the day. Maude's letters, which he had grown to expect every Wednesday and Saturday, were the chief pleasures in his life. Once, indeed, she had said that, as he was now on a fair road to recovery, she thought he could not want to hear from her any more; but he had written to assure her that his constitution required a great deal of amusement, and that she was quite mistaken in supposing that he was so nearly well; that the doctor, in fact, was prepared to certify that all the progress he had made might easily be undone, and that it was evident that she must not cease her kindness to him yet.

As practice made perfect, he grew quite a dexterous writer with his left hand; and his answers to her letters grew longer and longer. Lady Loder, who had at first

laughed about the correspondence, had now forgotten all about it, and Maude, for some reason or other, did not remind her of it by any allusion to letters sent or received; Christine was far too preoccupied to ask any questions; and Effie, who knew about it too, and looked upon it as a rather curious transaction, but one which was likely to help to bring about an event which seemed to her desirable for her friend's happiness, also discreetly held her tongue.

At last the 19th of July arrived, the day but one before Christine's wedding. Lodgings had been taken in Queen Street for Mr. and Mrs. Ransome, and their daughters, and they were all four to dine in Hertford Street, where Mr. and Mrs. Carew had been invited to meet them.

Christine had slightly sprained her ankle at a dance the previous week—at least, so

she said; and as the doctor had prescribed complete rest, she had been unfortunately unable to go to Falconbridge for Bee's marriage. However, as far as could be gleaned from some unusually incoherent letters from Mrs. Ransome, all had gone off most successfully. Beatrix had looked lovely; she had worn orange blossom and myrtle, spangled with dew, on her head, and had spoken her responses quite loud, and had gone away in blue cashmere trimmed with gold braid; and the best man had made such a funny speech, and had said he knew each of the bridesmaids longed to be in the bride's shoes, and he wished them each as good a husband before the year was out, which, seeing that Hester was not yet eight, was ridiculous; and Albert had given Bee three diamond stars for her head, and a row of pearls, and a diamond locket for her neck; but she had

not been married in the pearls, because pearls meant tears, but still it was none the less handsome of him.

To say the truth, Christine could have dispensed with this family dinner-party. She had also used her influence in favour of a different lodging, which would not have been vacant till a day later; but Lady Loder had differed from her, and she could not openly say that the less she saw of her relations, the better pleased she should be. She went to tea at their lodging, so as to allow the first rush of Mrs. Ransome's volubility to expend itself in private, and before she left, she found an opportunity to say—

"Lady Loder is very tired this afternoon, and so I think we must not talk very much, or keep her up very late this evening."

And Mrs. Ransome, who was accustomed

to early hours, responded, "Certainly not, child. Will she want to go to bed before ten, or will it do if we leave then?"

The evening went off very well. Lady Loder was determined to be civil; Edward was quite filially charming; Effie did her best to make herself pleasant; and happily Mrs. Ransome was a good deal subdued by the sight of so many strangers; whilst Lotty and Florence did not talk much, so absorbed were they in consuming huge platefuls of jelly and cream, and in wondering whether it would, or would not, be perfectly safe to indulge in a second glass of champagne, for, like Noah, they were unacquainted with the exact strength of fermented liquids.

The following morning Christine had an exhibition of her trousseau, and then her mother's spirits overflowed. She turned the dresses over and over, taking mental

notes for future use; she admired the lace, tried on the bonnets, and finally grew quite piously thankful to Heaven for such unprecedented mercies.

"The only thing that puzzles me, Christine, is how Beatrix could call dear Edward's hair sandy; it passes my understanding," she said, when her gratitude to Heaven had run its course.

The little mistake had never been explained to Mrs. Ransome.

"It wasn't Edward whom she saw; it was Peter Menteith. He had taken me to walk with his mother in the Park, but we did not find her, so we were going home by a back path."

"Ah, Christine, if you could have had him, now! I suppose he will have over ten thousand a year."

"Mamma!" cried Christine, indignantly, "you would not have had me marry him

rather than Edward? I could have done so if I had liked," she added complacently; "and a Mr. Grimstone, too."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Mrs. Ransome; "four offers in a year. Why, Christine, if you had waited, who knows but you might have married a duke!"

"I am quite satisfied, thank you," said her daughter, laughing, but flattered.

There certainly never was a more lovely bride than Miss Ransome, when, the following morning, she stepped from Lady Loder's brougham, and walked up the steps of St. George's, Hanover Square. For a moment she faltered as the doors were thrown back, and she felt every eye in the church turned towards her, and knew that she was the centre of everybody's thoughts throughout that large concourse of people; then she bravely advanced, followed by her white-robed brides-

maids, and went through the service with the utmost composure. Mrs. Ransome, clothed in a quiet chocolate toilette, looked quite respectable; and Florence and Lotty, in their bridesmaid's dresses, were perfectly inoffensive. Mrs. Menteith was present, fanning herself with a huge fan, and smelling at a vinaigrette, till either that, or her emotions brought tears into her eyes. Peter had originally debated whether he should accept his invitation or not, but had finally decided to come as the triumphantly successful lover of Esmé Beech; and since then he had almost forgotten the episode in his life in which Christine had played a part, and would have been surprised and indignant, if any one had looked upon him as a rejected lover of hers. He treated her with patronizing cousinly affection, and gave her a pair of diamond ear-rings.

The breakfast followed. Mrs. Ransome

was put in charge of Lord Glamorgan, who did everything in his power to make himself agreeable to her; nevertheless, what with awe of her distinguished companion, and a sense of suffocation arising from the overcrowding of the not very large dining-room, the poor lady felt thoroughly oppressed and miserable, and was entirely shorn of her usual conversational gifts.

Elspeth Vivian, mischievous as ever, perceived her from afar, and took up a post of vantage, whence she observed her sufferings with a malicious air. "The sight of rustic beauty in distress was touching," she observed afterwards. "Her gloves and handkerchief would not remain on the edge of the table, but perpetually dropped on to the floor. Once, in looking down to see if they were gone again, she dipped her satin strings into her soup, and

actually put the ends surreptitiously into her mouth, and sucked them gently, in order to remedy the disaster!" Here Elspeth rubbed her hands with glee. "Then she asked for some pine-apple, and I heard her say to Lord Glamorgan, 'May I ask your lordship for the salt?' He looked a good deal puzzled, but of course he gave it her; and then she covered her slice with it, and, what is still more wonderful, she ate it."

Whether these aspersions on Mrs. Ransome's character were true or not, it is impossible to say, for Miss Vivian was rather addicted to drawing the long-bow; but certain it is that the bride's mother was not enjoying herself as she had expected to do.

There were no speeches, either; the wit and humour which might have been latent in the brain of the best man, and might have

enlivened them as much as those of the successful speaker at Bee's wedding, were not allowed the chance of developing themselves; altogether, she could not but feel it was a dull, though unmistakably a grand affair. Hester and Sophy, who were celebrating their sister's wedding at Alexandra Villa, by dining off a duck, and sharing the whole of the stuffing between them, were far happier than she was in the midst of her splendour. Mrs. Ransome was much relieved when the departure of the bride and bridegroom, "*en route*," as the papers say, "for Selby Court," allowed her to return to Queen Street, divest herself and the twins of their finery, and go in a cab to Madame Tussaud's, where they saw Henry VIII. and all his six wives, King Cetewayo, the Pope of Rome, and Hannah Dobbs.

"So now you and I are all alone,

Maudie," said Lady Loder, as the carriage of the last guest drove from the door, and they stood together in the deserted drawing-room, as the elder lady had stood the day that Effie left her.

"We shall miss her very much," replied Maude. "How nice she looked! I don't think I ever saw a girl anywhere as pretty as Christine."

"Where can she get her looks from? Florence and Lotty are worthy descendants of their excellent parents, but Christine is quite different. Bee is pretty, isn't she?"

"I believe so. But, except in face, I fancy she is just like the rest of her family."

Life settled down to its usual routine. London was rapidly thinning. Balls were getting as rare as strawberries in August. Now and then they went to a garden-

party, and occasionally they were asked to go to a water-party. But these invitations Maude resolutely declined, for some reason unknown to Lady Loder. "She is afraid of boating," "She is nervous on the water," her cousin kept repeating when the invitations were pressed. Whence such a fiction had arisen no one knew. Maude had had her boat on the lake at Selby, and many were the hours she had spent in it on the summer days. Still, as the fiction was a convenient one, the girl let it pass. The truth was she could not forget when, and with whom, her first water-party was to have taken place, and all the shame and sin and misery which had grown out of events connected with it. She had put from her, as far as she could, all recollection of that sad time; she had forgiven the chief actor in those scenes the sorrow he had caused her, and the

injury he had tried to do her, but she shrank from putting herself without cause in a position which must unavoidably recall these things to her mind. There would be a hideous discrepancy between such memories, and the external surroundings of gaiety and amusement. "She would rather not go on the river," she said to her cousin, and hence arose the impression that Maude was afraid of entering a boat.

On the 31st they were to leave London, and succeed Christine and Mr. Carew at Selby. It was not without regrets that Lady Loder prepared to tear herself away from her beloved London; but "everybody" was going or gone, and it was naturally impossible to stay. Besides, when "everybody" had departed, it may be doubted whether the shrivelling leaves, the parched-up grass, the burning

squares, the long vista of closed shutters, and the melancholy remains in the shop-windows, would not have been too much for even Lady Loder's metropolitan tastes.

Maude was glad to go, she dared not say how glad, for fear of seeming ungrateful for the real kindness with which her cousin had treated her during the past months. Dear Selby! she could hardly believe she was to see it again. She had left it in the spring, thinking that it might be years before she would stand once more on its loved threshold; she had heard Lady Loder discussing this plan and that plan for filling up the summer months, and every time she had thought of suggesting that they should be spent at Selby her courage had failed her, and the words had turned to silence on her tongue. At last one day, to her great surprise, Lady Loder had proposed the idea herself, and

great had been Maude's joy ever since. She trembled to think how her guardian would bear the solitude, for Selby was undeniably a dull place, as far as society was concerned. They must spend a time there alone; and when Lady Loder gave signs of bearing it no longer, they must invite some friends to come and stay with them.

The 31st came at last. Maude had slept but little the previous night, so excited was she about going "home" again. Her heart beat fast as they flew along the line, and as the objects on either side grew more and more familiar, with each passing mile. At last they stopped, and it seemed to her as if it were but yesterday that she had left the place. There was the fat, important-looking little station-master, whom in her childhood she had regarded with deep awe as a

person at whose bidding railway-trains would run over all offenders; there was the yellow-and-red omnibus from the Three Ravens; there the one-armed boy, who earned a scanty livelihood, by carrying odds and ends for passengers to and from the inn.

As they drove to the house in a fly, the black-and-tan toy terrier from the rectory ran out and barked, as he had barked at every passing vehicle for the last six years; old Betty Smith, who took a benevolent interest in public affairs, was still peering out of the cottage porch, and rubbing her hands as of yore in her checked apron; and as half-past four struck, the school-children came rushing down the playground steps, holloaing and shouting with their shrill voices. How she warmed up with love to them all—the toy terrier, the old woman, and the chil-

dren! Not that they were particularly interesting or lovely, but they belonged to the place, and that was enough. But when they had passed the lodge gates, Maude began to shrink at the thought of going home. Outside the house all was unchanged; inside, oh! how different everything would be! Where was the kind voice which had sounded throughout her early years? Silent, to be heard no more. Where was the kind hand that used to be passed lovingly over her hair, and the lips which were pressed on her cheek, when she returned after a few hours' absence? Gone, never to return. Where was the kind heart which had thought for her and cared for her in old days? Gone! —all gone! A revulsion of feeling came over her; her light-heartedness fled; her joy turned to heaviness; her eyes filled with tears.

"What a lucky girl you are to possess such a charming place!" said Lady Loder, cheerfully. "It is three years, I think, since I was here: how everything has grown up since then!"

"The soil is very good just round the house, and the shrubs and trees like it," answered Maude. One must take people as one finds them; it is vanity and vexation of spirit to expect too much, and Maude knew it; yet it did seem hard that her cousin should not be able to enter a little more into her feelings just then.

One thing that looked exactly like days gone by, was that Smut was waiting to receive them. He was sitting in the same bare round patch in the mignionette bed, which he had sat in for years, till he had made it quite hard and polished. How kind, how very kind, of Sir Walter to think of sending the little fellow back to meet her!

She knew that he was still in Ireland, though the doctor now promised him speedy release; so he must have written and desired that the dog should be brought over. It was really a most thoughtful attention. Mrs. Robson, too, was awaiting the arrival of her pet. At Lady Loder she looked with curiosity, not unmixed with aversion, but she threw her arms round Maude's neck and kissed her. "I must have one kiss, whatever she may say," she exclaimed, assuming that her treasure's guardian must be her natural enemy; but Lady Loder was nowise disposed to grudge her the embrace.

The house looked comfortable and inhabited. Mr. and Mrs. Carew had only departed that morning, and Christine's deft fingers had left their traces behind them in all the flower-vases. A room that is full of flowers never seems very desolate.

How bright the garden looked through the drawing-room window! And there was even "Hoppie," the old lame pheasant, eating out of the barley-box, which had been put on the lawn to attract Hoppie and his brothers, but which he and the earwigs usually shared between them. Everything at Selby gave her that strange feeling that blots out weeks, months, nay, years of a life, and joins the distant past to the present, in an uninterrupted sequence of time. The noisy, bustling city which she had left only that morning, had faded from her mind, with all that had happened to her there. It seemed once more as if she had spent her whole life in the spot to which she had now returned. She could almost fancy she could see her aunt Ellen sitting reading her book, under the lime tree on the lawn.

Next morning Maude went down with a

full heart and enthusiastic greetings, to the village. Perhaps she was a little disappointed with her reception there. Every one expressed pleasure at having her once more among them, but their joy was founded on such very self-interested reasons that, without owning it to herself, she was a trifle chilled.

"I am right-down pleased to see you, Miss Loder," said Mrs. Mears; "it's bad times for poor folk when the big house is shut, and never a sup of soup or a bite of meat to come from it."

"I'm real pleased to have you back again, miss," remarked Betsy Smith, still rubbing her hands in her apron. "Sarah Jane has never had a day's washing since your laundry was closed."

"I was that glad to hear you was expected, miss," said Mrs. Middleton. "I have thought of you many and many's the

time;" but she added, "There's Jim turned sixteen and not apprenticed yet; I thought as you would maybe give us some help in getting him out."

Wherever she went the same thing was repeated. Considering that these poor old ladies had to make both ends meet on eight shillings a week, nothing, she knew, could be more natural; but she had looked forward so to seeing them—to giving them the little presents she had chosen with great care in London, and to talking over old times! To find herself so entirely secondary to the soup, and the laundry was rather depressing. She did not stay quite so long at the almshouses as she had intended, but returned to the house, where she found her cousin pushing the chairs and tables about, and rearranging the rooms.

"I don't like a round table in the middle of the room, Maude, do you?" she said.

"If we put it in the bay window, and have that small table here for the lamp in the evening, and pull out those sofas from the wall, and turn the piano round into the room, everything will look a great deal better. You don't mind the furniture being moved, do you?"

"Oh no," said Maude, a little sadly; but that Lady Loder did not notice. "Arrange it all as you like best, Cousin Mary." And she escaped; but not before she heard Lady Loder say to the footman, who was assisting her—

"That old work-basket, Henry,—I think it may go out of the room; it is so faded and worn."

It had been her aunt Ellen's work-basket, and now it was to go to the lumber-room! She knew Lady Loder would have left it undisturbed had she said one single word in its favour, but she

would not let it stay on sufferance when it was wished away. She stopped Henry, who was bearing it up to the box-closet, and took it to her own bedroom. These fretting annoyances were going on all day, and naturally diminished the pleasure of being at home again.

It was not till the middle of August that a carriage drew up at the door, and Sir Walter Grenville got out. His ruddy, sunburnt colour had been replaced by a girlishly fair complexion; he looked weak and thin, and he still carried his arm in a sling.

Maude was thoroughly glad to see him, and quite forgot to be shy. Lady Loder had spent a fortnight in her rural retreat, and would have welcomed an itinerant cornet-player, or a passing pedlar!

"I am so glad to see you," she said.

"Now you are to be obedient, and let me take care of you in my own way, for you really look none the better for your accident. Come and sit in this armchair, and we will have the tea brought up at once, and then you shall tell me a hundred things I want to know. First of all, how are you, and what can you do with your arm?"

"That is easily answered. I am perfectly well, thank you; but I can do nothing with my arm. It is too soon to expect to be able to use it."

"Does it hurt you still?" asked Maude.

"Oh no; the pain has quite ceased. I did not feel much after the first fortnight."

"And what has been done with the man who shot you?"

"I think my agent touched him up a little; he turned and fired as the horse galloped off, and the fellow cried out. The

same evening the police found Master Pat. Brown said he was sure it was the man whom, if you remember, I told you we thrashed for trying to set fire to the roof; and there was a wound at the top of his right shoulder. 'He had done it, poor body, against a stake in a hedge he had been obliged to get through,' his wife said. 'As to handling a gun, he wouldn't know which end it shot out of,' etc. At this moment Pat is in for trial at the next Assizes, and though, of course, he will get off, that place in his arm will be something to remember us by."

They talked a great deal of Irish affairs, and drank a great deal of tea. Sir Walter could hardly take his eyes off Maude as she sat opposite him, in her fresh white cotton, with a little bunch of roses and scented geranium leaves in the front.

"How good it was of you to think of

sending Smut back! I don't like, however, to take him away like that."

"Indeed, I think you have the best possible right to him; he is not so fat as when I have the feeding of him, but I am not sure he does not look all the better."

"Why should not you come here and stay for a bit, and fatten him up yourself?" asked Lady Loder. "It must be very dull for you at Shustone, now that you are not able to get about much."

"Thank you," said the young man; "you are very kind."

"Will you come?"

"I—I don't quite know—I am not sure if I could," he replied.

"Well, you must think it over, and let us know. How are all your works getting on?"

"I can't say. I only got home just before luncheon; I have not had time to go and see."

"Really!"

Sir Walter looked rather foolish.

"By-the-by," said Lady Loder, "I have just finished such an amusing novel; you must read it, and tell me what you think of it. I will fetch it for you."

"Let me get it," said Maude.

"No, no; you could not find it. I will go for it myself."

She left the room. There was a dead silence.

"I don't know how to thank you enough for your letters, Miss Loder," said Sir Walter, presently. "I think they did more to cure me than the doctor."

"I am very glad, I'm sure," replied Maude, opening and shutting a book that lay on the table.

"I liked all your books, too, and best of all the passages that you marked."

"Did you? They say it is wrong to

scribble in library books, but it always interests me to see the criticisms of my predecessors."

"So it does me."

A long silence. Lady Loder's step was heard coming down the oak staircase—pat, pat, pat.

"I didn't answer her invitation," he said hurriedly, nodding in the direction of the door, "because, you see—it—it is your house, and it is for you to settle who you will have in it or not."

"Oh no," she replied; "it is Cousin Mary's house, as far as all invitations and arrangements go."

A chair fell over in the hall; Lady Loder stopped to pick it up.

"You must see I cannot come unless you ask me yourself. I shall certainly not force myself upon you."

Lady Loder's hand was on the door.

"What shall I say to her?"

"Say you will come," she replied.

The novel was duly made over to Sir Walter, with many comments on its excellencies. Maude had not read it, so of course she had no opinion to express.

"It must be a capital story, from your account," he said; "it will occupy my evenings for two or three nights; and then, as you are good enough to ask me, I will come here and stay for a few days. Shustone is certainly dreadfully dull, now that I am so helpless."

And so it came to pass that, before many days had elapsed, Sir Walter took up his quarters at Selby. At first no particular time was mentioned for the duration of his visit, but little less than a week passed by before it ended; and many were the hours that he and his young hostess spent together, walking, sitting under the limes,

or paddling about in the boat on the lake. At first Maude made some demonstration of remaining by herself during the morning, and seeing that he invariably joined her if she went into the garden, she established herself in the boudoir with her books and work. For a good while she saw him wandering about outside, as if waiting for some one, and then at last he passed by the window, and found her.

"Please come out," he said; "you can't think how dull I am alone."

"I can't waste the whole of the morning," she responded. "If I come out, will you read to me?"

"Certainly."

And so it was settled.

There is no way in which the shy Englishman, and his shy fellow-islander make better acquaintance than by reading together; that is, supposing they are per-

sons of even moderately bookish tastes. There are no end of things which they would feel quite foolish in themselves starting as subjects for discussion, about which they will courageously exchange ideas, if the responsibility of suggesting them is shifted to an author.

Maude and her companion made rapid strides towards intimacy, as they read and talked over the social subjects brought before them by several of the books of Aurora Leigh; and argued for and against the reading of critical literary essays; Maude trying to bring her friend to an appreciation of Hutton and Bagehot, whilst he, to the last, would only repeat, "I hate picking things to pieces like that; it spoils them altogether."

At last a note came from the Shustone foreman, requesting Sir Walter's presence. There were matters of importance that

required the master's decision. There was no help for it; he had his things packed up, and went back to his dreary home.

Then Maude recognized and admitted to herself the gap which his absence made in the house. The breakfast-table looked empty, the garden seemed deserted; Smut had lost the habit of walking with her, and lay all day in the mignonette bed; she found it dull reading alone, with no one to talk over her book with her. To make bad worse, three rainy days followed each other; and whether the piano was out of tune or no, it did not appear to suit Maude's voice.

The evening of the third day the rain stopped, and there was a glorious sunset. Maude remained in the garden watching it, till the sun had been hidden a long while behind the neighbouring hills. The long low range were of a deep even

purple hue; above them was a line of clear transparent primrose-coloured sky, fading by degrees to a duller shade; and then came a faint peacock-blue, which in its turn sank away to a tender grey. One bright star came out and twinkled just above the highest point in the hills. Everything was peaceful and still; a light vapour rose in capricious stripes from some of the fields below, and could just be seen in the dim twilight.

"How sweet, how passing sweet, is solitude!"

thought the girl.

"But grant me still a friend in my retreat
Whom I may whisper, Solitude is sweet."

Never before had she thought Selby dull, but now for the first time it struck her that it was very retired and lonely.

It was about a fortnight after this, when Lady Loder and her cousin went out for

a drive, intending to be dropped at the rectory on the way home, and pay a visit to Mrs. Stainer. The first part of the programme was duly carried out, and they had almost reached the rectory gates, when Lady Loder suddenly remembered she had left all her letters on her writing-table—some open, and all unstamped.

"I think I must ask you, Maudie, to go home, and put up my letters for me. It is very stupid, but I have forgotten them all."

So Maude walked up to the house, by no means loth to escape the visit to Mrs. Stainer.

She had just thrown the last letter into the post-box, when a ring was heard at the front door, and peeping out, she saw Sir Walter's chestnuts standing before it.

"Is Lady Loder in?"

"Not at home, Sir Walter."

Maude held her breath. Would he ask for her? If she did, would the footman know she had returned? "I shall not see him," she thought. "He will go away."

"Is Miss Loder at home?"

"I think so; but I will see."

Maude noiselessly closed the drawing-room door, and returned to her seat on the sofa. She heard Henry go into the conservatory, then into the boudoir. At last he reached the room where she was sitting.

"Sir Walter Grenville wants to know if you are in, miss?"

"Oh yes."

And in a minute he was in the room.

"The chestnuts have come along well," he said, after they had exchanged greetings. "We did the five miles in twenty-three minutes."

"That is fast indeed," she replied.

"But I don't know that it is quite five miles from Shustone here, is it?"

"Very nearly, I think."

"And how is your arm?"

"All right, thank you; but rather weak. I am still obliged to submit to being driven, though, as you see, I have discarded my sling."

Henry brought in the tea, and Maude busied herself in pouring it out.

What a sociable, blessed institution five-o'clock tea is; the inventor ought to have a monument in Westminster Abbey. The miniature urn hissed, the biscuits crackled, the cream tumbled out of the cream-jug in great lumps; a general feeling of comfort and friendship was generated.

"What has happened to Lady Loder? Is she out?"

"Yes; she is calling at Mrs. Stainer's. I think she must be staying to tea there,

or she would have been back before now."

"I had a bad bit of news this morning," he remarked. "Alfred Pitt, my greatest friend, has been ordered off to the Cape."

"Really! That is very sad for you. How odd that your friend should be sent there! I heard a report the other day in the village that you were going to South Africa yourself." And Maude laughed.

"You seem very pleased at the idea. Do you want to get rid of me to Basutoland?"

"No, indeed; you are very unreasonable. What makes you think I wish to be rid of you?"

"Nothing, except that you looked so cheerful about it."

"Did I look cheerful? It can't have been at the notion of your departure, for I didn't put very firm faith in the report.

You would hardly have taken your passage without telling us?"

"Hardly, perhaps. But yet you know quite well that it would not make the least difference to you if I went or stayed." He spoke almost roughly.

"You ought not to say that. Have we been so unneighbourly? We should miss you very much." Her lip quivered a little as she spoke.

Sir Walter pushed aside his cup of tea, got up and walked to the window, and looked blankly out of it for a minute or two. Then he returned to the table, and stood there in silence, poking holes in the flowers with a pair of pointed scissors. "Miss Loder," he said suddenly, "I believe it would be better for me if I did go to the Cape, or anywhere away from here. I remember what you said to me that day in the park at Glaston, and I

suppose I'm not the sort of fellow you would be likely to care for; but yet I can't put you out of my thoughts. I don't want your friendship, I don't want your neighbourliness; I want your love, or nothing."

He paused; and she breathed quickly, but did not reply.

"Is it quite out of the question? Could you never get to care for me? If you say so, I will believe you, and never trouble you again as I am doing now. I know how much above me you are in every way. You could never love me, could you?"

"I am sure I am not above you in any way. Please don't talk so."

"Then do you care for me a little?"

"Yes, certainly, a little."

Maude was sitting before her discarded plate of bread and butter, twisting her handkerchief round her fingers. It was

a bad habit, a very bad habit, and so Lady Loder had often told her, but she had never been able to break her of it, and still in moments of nervousness, or agitation, out came the forbidden handkerchief.

Sir Walter looked at her for a moment with hesitation. All in a minute the truth flashed into his mind. "I won't be liked a little. Say you love me with your whole heart, my own darling!"

He had thrown himself beside her on the sofa, and had drawn her towards him; but she did not resist.

"Do you love me, Maudie? Say so, and make me quite happy."

And she whispered, "Yes."

* * * * *

Lady Loder spent a long time at the rectory. That she should do so was a sign of the craving which, in her seclusion,

she felt for the sight of a stranger's face; for Mr. Stainer was the stiffest, most tiresome of elderly parsons, and Mrs. Stainer's mind, already pretty nearly absorbed in Johnnie and Bobbie, Ruth, Davie, and Alice, was at present (what little of it remained) filled to repletion with the confirmation class. Now, Lady Loder was not fond of children; and besides, Davie and Alice always roared when a visitor disturbed their serenity. She also looked upon confirmation classes as being no doubt mysteriously salutary, but as things that ought to be held in strict privacy by the clergy, and never openly alluded to. Yet such was her hunger for a glimpse of the world outside the Selby gates, that she had not only called at the rectory that afternoon, but suffered herself to be kept to tea. It had become of late a great problem with Lady Loder how she should

endure her rural existence till the time when it should be possible to return to London. She had noticed that her young charge had recently seemed less delighted to be there. Perhaps she would not mind leaving and making a tour of visits, or going abroad in the autumn.

It was about half-past six when Lady Loder arrived at home. The hall door swung back with its usual creak. "There she is! You must tell her. I shall make my escape;" and so saying she vanished through one door, as her cousin came in at the other.

"Sir Walter! You here! How good of you to wait! Have you been alone all the time? I sent Maude home to put my letters up, and I thought she was in. I suppose she went out again afterwards." Lady Loder talked so fast that the young man could not get in a word.

"I have not been alone," said Sir Walter, laughing rather foolishly. "In fact, I have been talking to Miss Loder all the time. She has this minute gone out of the room. Will you give her to me, Lady Loder? She has promised to be my wife."

"Has she really? I am very glad to hear it. No, I will not stand in her way, though what I shall do without either of my young ladies I can't guess."

Sir Walter was too happy to care much, or even to try and look sympathetic.

"You won't go away, will you? You can send back for your things," she went on; "and now I must go and find Maude and wish her joy."

Maude was sitting on a bench in the shrubbery, trying to take it all in. That she was intensely happy she knew, but it had all happened so quickly she could not understand it.

"Walter Grenville has told me what you and he have been arranging in my absence. Do you think I shall allow it?"

Maude started, but one glance at her cousin showed her that she was joking.

"Are you not pleased, Cousin Mary? There is no one in all the world like him. I am so happy."

"When did you begin to find it out, you monkey? Not at Glaston, according to what he told me then. I believe it was all the broken arm that did it. He will have to send a five-pound note and a letter of thanks to Pat."

## CHAPTER IX.

"There is something more awful in happiness than in sorrow. The latter is earthly and finite; the former composed of the substance and texture of eternity, so that spirits still embodied may well tremble at it."—NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

ONE short chapter more, and we bring our story to a close. It was not to be expected that the heiress of Selby's marriage could follow her engagement as speedily as Miss Ransome's had done; and though Lady Loder, pining for the dawn of the day which should release her from bondage, pressed on the lawyers as much as she could, those gentleman as usual took their own time, and did not let themselves be over-hurried.

The summer leaves had put on their autumn dress, and still business matters were uncompleted. Maude was not sorry; she wished for no change. Walter spent his time almost entirely with them, and together they wandered through the brilliant woods, and the glades among the hills. The evenings were growing cold; sometimes a touch of frost would catch the grass and falling leaves, and make them crunch underfoot as the afternoon closed in. The log fire reappeared in the old hall.

"Sit down there, Maudie," he said one evening; "I want to see you just in the same position that you were sitting in the day I called here last March. Yes, that is it. As I came in I thought I had never seen such a pretty sight as you were in your black gown, with the firelight behind."

"And that was only nine months ago. How everything has changed since then!

I little thought what we should be to each other now."

"I did," said Walter; "at least, I knew what I wished we might become to each other."

"Well, I certainly never guessed it. Don't you long for a peep into futurity, so as to see what we shall be doing five years hence?"

"We shall be as happy, or happier, than we are now. We love each other, so ours will always be a happy home, Maudie."

"I hope so; a very happy home," she repeated thoughtfully. "What a nice word 'home' is, and everything connected with it—from home-made bread upwards and downwards! All except home-truths," she added, laughing. "Isn't it odd that the most odious of things should have the best of names? We will have no home-truths, Walter."

"You want to be perpetually flattered, you vain little thing!"

"No, not exactly; but I shall never let you make rude rough speeches to me. I am not like you Irish people, who can afford to quarrel and squabble and say and hear hard things. You all forget and forgive ten minutes afterwards; but I am English; and, please remember, of a particularly vindictive, long-memoried disposition. I think it would kill me, Walter, if you said an unkind thing to me;" and she looked up at him appealingly.

Maude had lapsed into one of her serious moods, but he was unfailingly cheerful. He took hold of her long white hand, and began to play with the rings on it.

"I think I can insure you against dying that death," he answered; and he looked at her with eyes overflowing with tenderness.

At last the lawyers announced that their

share of the work was done, and the wedding was fixed for a day in the first week of November.

There had been a difficulty about bridesmaids; the engaged couple were so ill off in the matter of relations, that some very distant cousins had to be pressed into the service.

"I mean to be one of your bridesmaids, Maude," Elspeth Vivian had written. "I claim it as a right, after being the first to prophesy your marriage. I don't like light-coloured uniforms at this time of year; and besides, I happen just to have bought a new ruby velvet toilette, so I think the others shall be dressed in ruby velvet too."

Maude had no objection; and so all the distant cousins were arrayed to match Miss Vivian.

The day before the wedding, Selby was

filled to overflowing. Mr. and Mrs. Carew came, so did Edward and Christine, so did Lord Glamorgan, and so did the six bridesmaids.

The next morning dawned clear and frosty; dull November seemed to have borrowed a day from bright October. The fern on the hillside, and the oak coppice, vied with one another in the brilliancy of their ruddy browns; not a breath of air stirred; the cloud-shadows moved in a leisurely manner across the mountains; the little brooks rippled along, sparkling as they went. People quoted the proverb, "Blessed is the bride whom the sun shines on," till every one was weary of hearing it. The bells rang, the village was alive with carriages and wedding guests, and gay with arches. And Maude, hardly conscious of bells, guests, or arches, but awed by the feeling that the future to which she

had grown accustomed in thought, was now actually become the present, and stilled by the weight of her almost too great happiness, drove down to the church, and went through the service which launched her into a new phase of her existence.

It was almost a relief when the intensity of the strain was over, and she found herself once more in her own drawing-room, surrounded by neighbours and friends, all bent on showering kindly wishes upon her, and asking her questions about her presents and their donors.

"Somebody said, Walter," the bride remarked, "that Mrs. Stainer had decorated the whole of the chancel. It was very stupid of me not to notice it; but I saw nobody and nothing; an odd feeling came over me, as if you and I were quite alone together in the church."

"You don't stand excitement well," he

answered. "You looked so white, that for a moment I was quite frightened."

Another brief hour or two, and the husband and wife were in the carriage driving towards the lodge gates, on their way to the station.

They were to go to Dover that afternoon, and start next day for Florence, taking the Italian lakes by the way. And there we will leave them. They have before them as fair a prospect of happiness as falls to the lot of any of the human race; and if the horizon should darken, and troubles should come, they have faith and love and hope to bear them through, and an unshaken trust that, to the brave and true, good, not evil, is the end of all things, and that sooner or later it will come to those who only know how to wait.

Lady Loder lost not a moment in preparing for her departure from the solitudes

of Selby. No sooner had the wedding party dispersed, than she started on a round of visits in her friends' country houses, after which she spent a very agreeable month in Paris, preparatory to entering upon another London season; but this time, alas! without the additional zest which had been lent to the previous one, by the companionship of her two pretty girls.

THE END.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES. *R. T. T.*

AUG 11 1883
DEC 10 1883
FEB 4 1885
NOV 27 1885
FEB 2 1887
SEP 6 1888
SEP 15 1888
APR 22 1890
NOV 22 1895